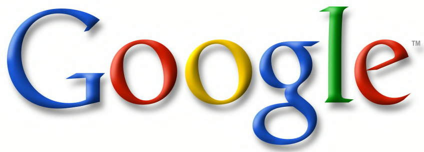


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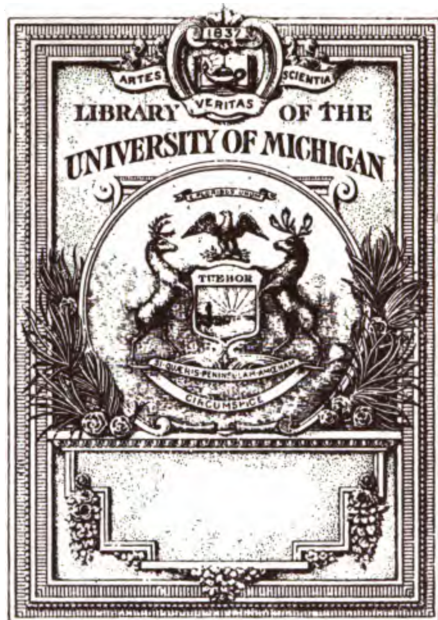
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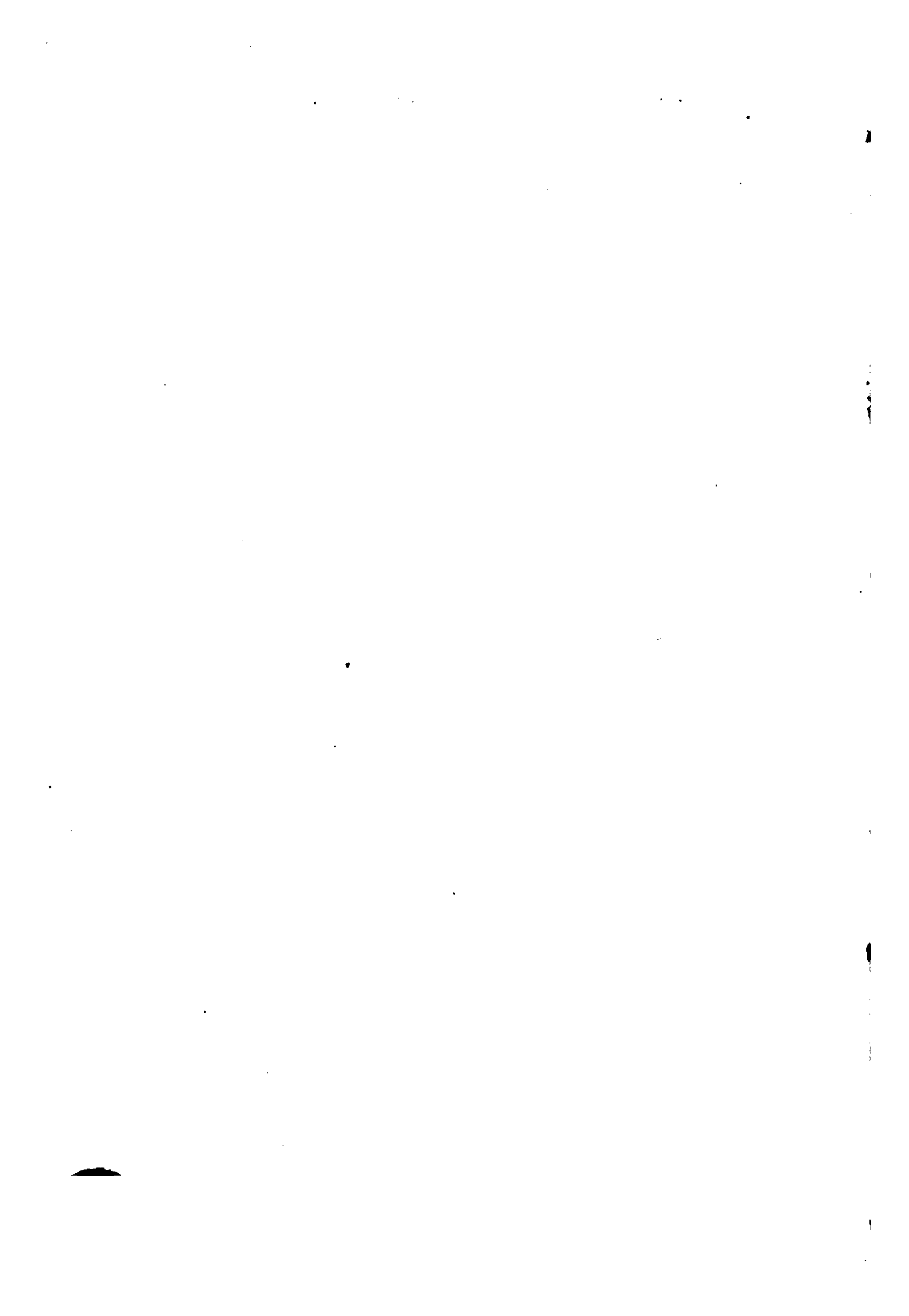
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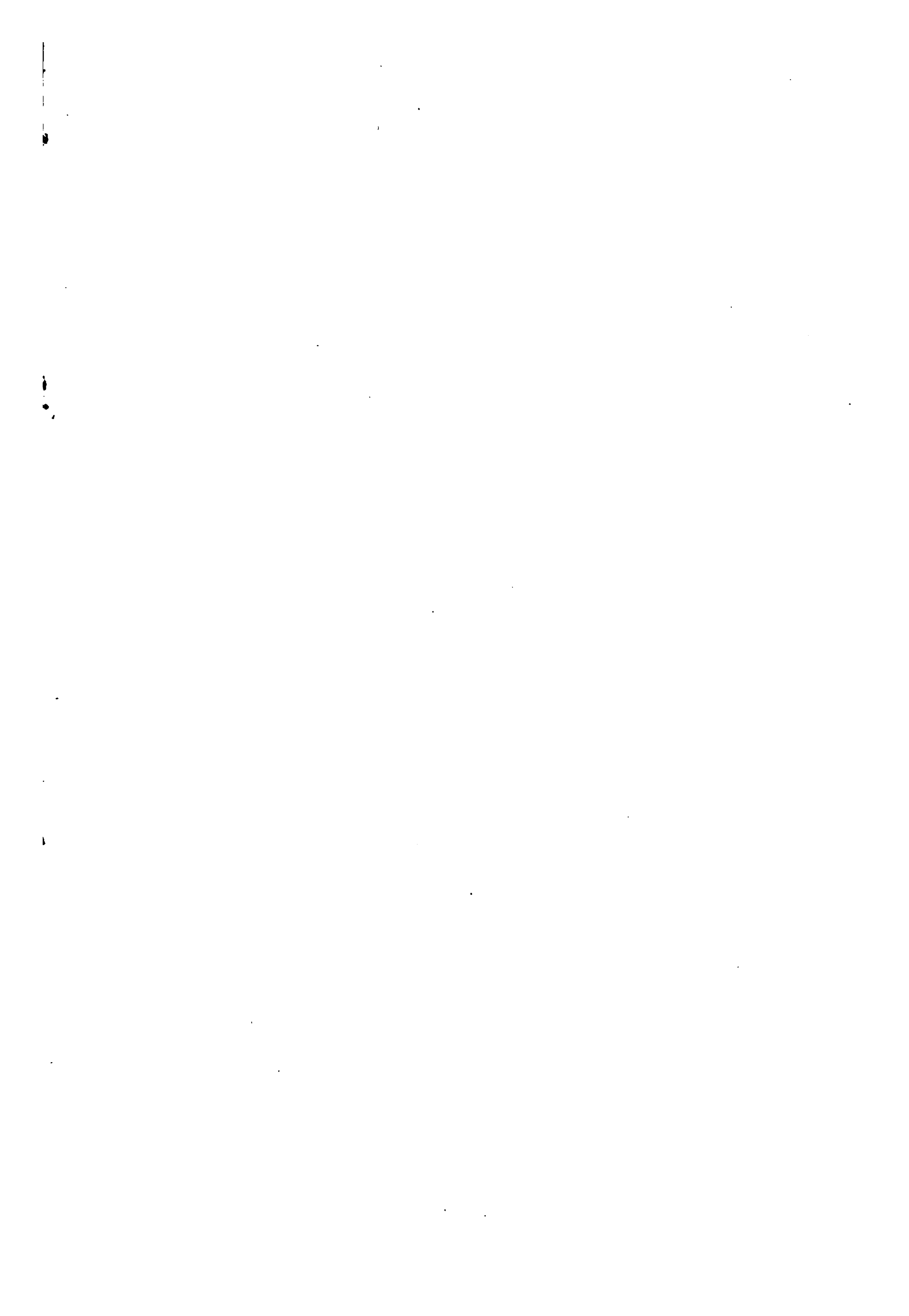
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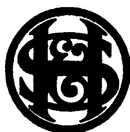


THE LIMITATIONS OF LIFE AND OTHER SERMONS

BY

WILLIAM M. TAYLOR, D.D., LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "PARABLES OF OUR SAVIOUR," "MIRACLES OF OUR SAVIOUR," ETC.



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PREFACE.

It would neither be just to myself, nor complimentary to those who may become my readers, to say that these sermons have been chosen at random out of that pile of manuscripts which is constantly accumulating in every minister's study, and whose final destination is the fire. On the contrary, they have been deliberately selected, not only because of the present and permanent importance of their subjects, but also and especially because, in the experience of many who heard them, they were felt to be helpful to them in their prosecution of the Christian life. There is not a discourse here reproduced which has not already been useful to some souls, and if, when preached thus through the press, that usefulness shall be widened, the great end of their publication will be secured.

New York, 10*th Nov.*, 1879
5 West Thirty-fifth Street.

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THE LIMITATIONS OF LIFE.

COLOSSIANS iv. 18.—" Remember my bonds."

WHAT an exquisite pathos there is in these words of Paul! He is now "such an one as Paul the aged," and the tremor of years is in his hand. He is, besides, "the prisoner of the Lord Jesus Christ," and the chain by which his right arm is bound to the left arm of "the soldier that kept him," impedes the free motion of his wrist, so that he cannot write with his usual ease. Hence, as he takes the pen from his amanuensis and appends the salutation whereby this letter was to be authorized, he delicately apologizes for the uncouth irregularity of the characters which he has traced by adding this clause, "Remember my bonds." It is a touching picture, and if I had the genius of the painter, I should like to delineate the venerable apostle, surrounded by his faithful friends, in the act of giving his autographic endorsement to the epistle which he has been inditing to his scribe, and which he is now about to send forth on its mission of instruction.

But it is not for that purpose that I have selected these words, as the topic for our meditation this morning. My design rather is to draw, from the circumstances in which the great apostle was at this time placed, a few lessons which may serve to cheer and encourage us amid the hampering limitations within which our work on earth has to be carried on. We have all our bonds. There is not one of us who

does not feel himself fettered somehow or somewhere, so that he cannot quite accomplish all that he desires to do. Continually we discover that the realization of our aspirations, or the attainment of our purposes, is marred by some chain, even as the penmanship of Paul was made angular and irregular by his bonds. "We could have done so much better," so we often say, "if some unavoidable and disturbing influence had not prevented us."

Thus we are each carrying about with us a chain, of which, so long as we are working within its limits, we may be largely unconscious, but which brings us to a stand the moment we have gone to its farthest length. The business man, if he is to serve God in his daily pursuits, must look after them, and so he is bound to his counting-house by a cord which neither his God nor his conscience will allow him to break. The professional man is hemmed in by his engagements as really as the prisoner is by the walls of his dungeon —with this difference, that in the latter case the restraints are external and physical, in the former they are internal and spiritual. The invalid is held down to her couch as truly by weakness as the galley-slave was held to his seat by his chains; and her devoted nurse is kept continually at the bedside of the sick one by a cord, which is not the less real because it is invisible, or the less powerful because its strands consist of love. The mother is, for the most part, bound to the home, so that, wherever she goes, she feels tugging at her heart the silken string that ties her to the cradle and its tiny inmate. The poor man is hampered by his poverty, and he who is the servant of another has his service of God in some sort conditioned and qualified by the duties which he owes to his earthly master. Thus each of us has his own bonds; and

hardly a day elapses without our feeling it needful at its close to come to God, and say to him as an explanation of the poor quality of the work we bring him: "Remember my bonds."

You know all about this, my friends; many times over you felt it during the week that has just passed, and even as I have been speaking, you have been anew made conscious of the weight of your chain, and seem to yourselves to be hearing the clanking of its links. But I have not designed thus to aggravate your humiliation. I want rather to remove it altogether; and it seems to me that we may find a few things suggested by this chapter in the history of Paul which may tend to reconcile us to our bonds, and lead us to say as he did, "most gladly will I glory even in mine infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

I. Notice, then, in the first place, that the apostle's bonds were no disgrace to him. He had not been imprisoned for any "matter of wrong or wicked lewdness." He was where he was because he would not do what he knew to be wrong. Hence his chain was the trophy of principle, and was really more ornamental to him than the bracelets of our fashionable ladies are to them. If he had not cared so much about preaching the simple unfettered gospel of Christ, he would never have been subjected to this abridgment of his liberty. Thus though he might at first regret what seemed to be the effect produced by his bonds, he never could be sorry for or ashamed of the cause for which they were put upon him. Now that was a great deal. He could not blame his own folly or wickedness for his present condition. It came to him when he was in the way of duty, and the con-

sciousness of that was a support and solace to him all through.

But it is quite similar with those providential limitations to our service of God and of our generation, which I have called our "bonds." There is no disgrace in poverty or in sickness, provided only we have not brought it upon ourselves by our iniquity. The business man has no need to be ashamed of his attention to his counting-house; nay, rather, the shame and sin would be if through neglect he should allow himself to drift into ruin. The mother cannot think that she is disgraced by the little ones that fill the nursery with their glee. Disgraced! nay, rather, she is highly favored among women, for it is written, "Lo! children are an heritage of the Lord." And if there be anywhere on earth the human incarnation of that angel who ministered to our Lord in his Gethsemane anguish, it is to be found in the devoted nurse who tends the fevered sufferer all through his midnight tossings. Let us not feel ashamed, therefore, and condemn ourselves if, because we are unavoidably called to the discharge of such duties, we cannot give ourselves to work in some public and popular department of church activity.

I am sorry that there should be need for such a style of remark. But the tendency of much that is said nowadays is to make one dissatisfied with himself if he be not engaged, in some way, in one or other of the common departments of ecclesiastical work. Now, it is good to have a church which will realize John Wesley's idea, "at work, all at work, and always at work." But it is not good to advocate this in such a way as shall wound those who, because of the limiting conditions in their lives, cannot respond to the call as, in other circumstances, they would. I have

known a gentle heart wellnigh broken because a minister, more remarkable for zeal than wisdom, almost as good as declared that those who were connected with the church, and who did not engage in a certain kind of work, were unworthy to be called Christians. But if he had only known it, the truth was that the quiet one whom he had almost crushed was every day doing a kind of service for Christ which required far more self-denial than that to which the preacher would have summoned her, and one, too, which she could not have neglected without sin.

But this is not all. The effect of such unqualified expressions upon those who are weak in health is apt to be most disastrous. It leads them to think that they are useless where they are, and tends to develop in them a spirit of impatience. But in reality the service of suffering is as well pleasing to God as is that of working. Usefulness is very good. But usefulness is not the whole of Christianity. Holiness is better, because holiness is useful without making any effort and by the simple fact of its existence. Now holiness comes out in suffering as well as in working. And so, provided we maintain holiness within the limits of our chain, it is no disgrace to us that we cannot go beyond them.

Shortly before I left the old country, I went to see a dearly beloved brother in the ministry who had been laid aside for two years by a severe and painful illness, of which he afterwards died. I had many long and profitable talks with him, and at length he set his daughter to read to me some beautiful hymns, written by one who was known to us both, and who had been kept from becoming a minister by life-long physical weakness. Of these my friend dwelt most upon one which indicated his own feelings under his trial, and

as it may be serviceable to some of you, I will repeat it here:

"I am not sent a pilgrim here,
My heart with earth to fill;
But I am here God's grace to learn,
And serve God's sovereign will.

"He leads me on through smiles and tears,
Grief follows gladness still;
But let me welcome both alike
Since both work out his will.

"The strong man's strength to toil for Christ,
The fervent preacher's skill
I sometimes wish,—but better far
To be just what God will.

"I know not how this languid life
May life's vast ends fulfil;
HE knows,—and that life is not lost
That answers best his will.

"No service in itself is small,
None great, though earth it fill;
But that is small, that seeks its own,
And great that seeks God's will.

"Then hold my hand, most gracious Lord,
Guide all my goings still:
And let this be my life's one aim,
To do or bear thy will."

Whatever, therefore, be the limitations of thy condition, whether they arise from poverty or sickness, or business or domestic duty, accept them as from God. They are no disgrace to you. Do all that you can do within them, and fret not because you can do nothing beyond them. Nay, remember this, that you will best succeed in doing something beyond them, by doing all you can within them.

II. Observe, in the second place, that Paul's bonds did not prevent him from being useful. I doubt not, for our apostle was very human, that Paul was sometimes saddened by the thought that his long imprisonment had kept him from that missionary work on which his heart was set; and yet, in the long run, he became convinced that his chain had really advanced the cause to which he was devoted; for in writing to the Philippians he wished them to understand "that the things which had happened unto him had fallen out rather to the furtherance of the gospel." It came about "on this wise." The soldier to whom he was bound was changed every four hours, until all the members of the company to which he belonged had taken turn in the service, and then the duty was passed on to another military party. So, by systematically and wisely embracing the opportunity of conversing with each of his guardians, Paul became instrumental in the conversion of many soldiers, and introduced the leaven of Christianity into the Roman army. This is what he refers to when he says "my bonds in Christ are manifest throughout the prætorian guard" (for so the word translated "palace" ought to be rendered) "and in all other places." * He came into contact with the lowest and the highest of the people, and was blessed in the salvation not only of the runaway slave Onesimus, but also of some of the inmates of Cæsar's household.

Nor was this all. It was at this time that he wrote his letters to the Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon; and who may undertake to estimate the results which these epistles have produced, and are still producing among men! Thus Paul was laid

* See Lightfoot's Philippians, pp. 97–102.

aside from personal activity for a time, in order that, through these letters, he might work for all time; and now, as we take a broad and comprehensive view of the whole case, we see that his usefulness was not prevented by his chain.

Now, there is much in all this to stimulate and encourage us. How much the business man might accomplish for the Lord, if he were only to do with those who are brought into immediate contact with him what Paul did with his soldier guardians! And is there on this earth any sanctuary so blessed as the sick chamber, where the pulpit is a couch of suffering, and the preacher is a patient, loving, gentle one who tries to bear all for Christ? Adolph Monod, the famous French Protestant clergyman, preached many most eloquent and powerful sermons to crowded congregations; but none of them produced such deep and permanent impressions as the devout utterances, interrupted often by paroxysms of pain, which he addressed during his long illness to those who came into his sick-room and joined him there in the observance of the Lord's Supper. His very weakness was a power which thrilled the hearts of his hearers, even as the clanking of Paul's chain was more effective than all his arguments, when he said before Agrippa—"except these bonds." And taking an illustration more in the line of Paul's experience in the case before us, I doubt whether many ministers have been instrumental in converting by their sermons as many souls as were blessed through the letters of Harlan Page.

It may seem a great hardship to the mother that she is kept by family cares from joining in the work of the mission school, or taking a share in any of the departments of active benevolence which the Church

has organized. But wait a little until that bright-eyed boy at her side has grown up to become a godly man, it may be a noble minister of the gospel, and then she will have the satisfaction of knowing that the influence of her training is telling through him upon thousands of hearts. Let this thought sink deep into our minds. We never lose in the long run, even in the matter of usefulness, by giving ourselves wholly to the work that is nearest us, and to which we seem to ourselves to be bound by a chain which we must not, dare not, cannot break. Another person can do as well in the mission school, or in the visitation of the ignorant from house to house, as our mother could; but who save she can be a mother to her children? Therefore let her do with undivided heart what lies nearest to her, and God through that will widen and perpetuate her influence. We are poor judges of ultimate results, and perhaps in the day of final apocalypse few things will surprise us more than the far-reaching benefits which have sprung from the labors of some humble Christian, who thought all the time that she was doing scarcely anything, and who, throughout, was feeling herself hampered and confined by the bonds within which Providence restrained her. Courage! then, my friend; do the little that you can within your sphere, and God will make it great. Work at that which is within the area of your chain, and Christ will carry it out far beyond the limits of your personal and immediate circle. You may be fettered, but he whom you serve is not bound; and so that which you put into his hand may be sent by him the world over.

III. But note now, in the third place, that Paul's bonds did not mar his happiness. When our apostle

was in the prison of Philippi, with his feet fast in the stocks and his back smarting from the scourge, we are told that "he prayed and sang praises unto God." And, doubtless, when he wrote the words of my text, the same joy was in his soul. In the letter to the Philippians, written at this time, he says, "I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content." And we cannot but feel that he is speaking from his own experience when he says, "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice," and recommends his readers to be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to let their requests be made known unto God, assuring them that the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, should keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. He could not have dictated these words if he had not at the time been in sympathy with the sentiments which they express. We are sure, therefore, that peace and joy were in his heart when he thus spoke. Nor is this all. It may be a mere fancy of my own; but it seems to me as I read over the three letters which date from his first imprisonment, namely, those addressed to the Ephesians, Colossians, and Philippians, that there is a lofty elevation of thought maintained in them, and a gladsome spirit running through them which we hardly discover in any other of his epistles. In any case, his imprisonment most evidently had not stifled his happiness; his chain had not bound his heart.

As I was writing these words, there broke upon my ears the song of a canary bird hanging in the room overhead. Its trilling notes were not a whit less joyous than those which I have often heard rained down from the infinite expanse of heaven by the little skylark of my native land. In spite of its cage that tiny warbler

sings, and when its young mistress goes to speak to it, there is a flutter of joy in its wings, as with ruffled neck and chattering gladness it leaps to bid her welcome. So let us accept our bonds, whether of poverty, or weakness, or duty, as the bird accepts its cage. You may cage the bird, but you cannot cage its song. No more can you confine or restrain the joy of the heart which, accepting its condition, sees God in it and greets him from it. To fret at our circumstances will not improve them; but it will make us worse ourselves. On the other hand, the way to get the most happiness out of life is to carry Christ continually in our hearts.

In the days of superstition men wore charms and amulets about them, under the belief that they would thereby insure themselves against disease. But no mere external appliance can keep sorrow from the soul. We must have Christ within it if we would charm misery away. That remedy is effectual. He "giveth songs in the night." It is an easy thing to make for one's self a song in the day of health and prosperity; but only Christ can inspire us to sing in feebleness and want and bondage. I do not know that in every point of her theology I could agree with Madame Guyon, but I do admire her passionate devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am sure if we had more of that we should be able in all our bondage, of whatsoever sort, to sing her prison song:

"My cage confines me round,
Abroad I cannot fly;
But though my wing is closely bound,
My heart's at liberty.
My prison walls cannot control
The flight, the freedom of the soul.

"Oh! it is good to soar
These bolts and bars above,
To Thee whose purpose I adore,
Whose providence I love:
And in Thy mighty will to find
The joy, the freedom of the wind."

It may almost seem to be an anticlimax to apply these beautiful words to the minor bonds which fetter us to our businesses, or to our home duties, or to our professional pursuits. But other things than iron links do make a chain, and other things than stone walls do make a prison. So, in spite of the apparent anticlimax, I insist on bringing the principles which underlie these lines to bear upon our daily lives, for in the measure in which we do so, we shall have happiness and peace.

IV. Notice, in the fourth place, that Paul's bonds did not lessen his reward. Opportunity is the measure of responsibility. He who had only two talents was not accountable for more, but when he doubled these, his reward was in the same ratio as his who had doubled five. "If there be first a willing mind it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." He who sat over against the treasury pronounced the noblest eulogy over her who had cast into it the smallest coin—because in estimating her merit he "remembered her bonds." He knew that her heart was larger than her means, and that she was lamenting all the time that she had not more to give. So he will give the same kindly consideration to the different providential hindrances with which we have to contend; and haply they, who through their lives have been regretting that they have done so little, may hear

at last the unexpected encomium: "He hath done what he could. He hath done more than they all."

In our thoughtlessness we are apt to connect reward only with activity. But Christ has connected it with character, and that is at once indicated and strengthened by suffering and by patience, as well as by work. Nay, I am not sure but that, when we get to right views on this matter, we may discover that suffering borne bravely for Christ is nobler than work performed for him. At any rate, I am sure of this, that when a sufferer does even in his sufferings all he can, or when one who is fettered by some encumbering influence does yet accomplish all that is possible for him, within the sphere that is open to him, he will in no case lose his reward. The consciousness of these fretting limitations will tend no doubt to make him more painfully sensible of the imperfections of his work. That which he has accomplished will be very different from that which he desired to do, and as he holds it up at last for the inspection of his Lord, he may be inclined to say: "It is not all that I once planned to do. It was in my heart to make it, oh! so much better! I have been an unprofitable servant, yet I have tried to do my best. Master! Remember my bonds!" And the appeal will not be made in vain, for the reply will come: "Well done! enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Nor should we forget, in connection with this whole subject, that we, too, are in some sort "the prisoners of the Lord Jesus Christ," and ought to wear our bonds patiently in remembrance of him. I saw lately in a delightful sketch of the philosopher Morse, a simple incident that may help here to illustrate my meaning. In his early painting days, Morse went into the studio of Benjamin West, with whom he was a special favor-

ite. That great artist was then engaged upon his famous picture of Christ Rejected, and after carefully examining his visitor's hands, he said to him, "Let me tie you with this cord, and place you there while I paint in the hands of the Saviour. So he stood still until the work was done, bound, as it were, in the Saviour's stead. I can fancy that a strange thrill would pass through Morse's breast as he thought of being, in any lowliest manner, identified thus directly with the Lord. But that was only in a picture. In the sternly real life of every day, however, we are each in some way bound by a chain in the Redeemer's stead, as representing him on earth; let us see to it, therefore, that we wear it as meekly and as bravely as he wore that wherewith for our sakes he was fastened to the lictor's stake. Thus again we come to that cross whereon for us the Saviour died, and find in it a motive strong enough to induce us to bear anything, or do anything, while we sing—

"Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?
No: there's a cross for every one,
And there's a cross for me.

"This consecrated cross I'll bear
Till death shall set me free,
And then go home, my crown to wear,
For there's a crown for me."

THE INCARNATION.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL.

JOHN i. 14.—"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

THE Gospel of John was written a considerable time after the other three, and has a character that is distinct and peculiar. It deals especially with the discourses of our Lord, and even of these its author has selected the most spiritual and sublime. The other Evangelists give us mainly a summary of the more prominent incidents in the Saviour's history, incorporating with that some of the more important of his utterances. But John presents us with a series of his most suggestive sayings, introducing only such events as are necessary to identify the occasions on which they were spoken, or to illustrate the meaning which they were intended to express. His narrative is a singular combination of simplicity of language with profundity of thought. As in looking at a mountain rivulet one is beguiled by its clearness into the belief that it is shallow, and discovers his mistake only when by trying to ford the stream he finds himself beyond his depth; so, in reading these chapters, the plainness of the words is apt to impose upon us, and we think we understand them thoroughly, until we begin to question ourselves regarding them, when we perceive that we are attempting to fathom the infinite. This is particularly true in reference to the opening sec-

tion. We read it with ease, so that we hardly think it needful to pause a moment over any of its clauses; but when we reach the climax in the words which I have taken as my text, and go back over the several verses by which they are preceded, we are lost in "the great and wide sea" which they open up for our exploration. It is but a little way that I can venture out upon that boundless ocean; nevertheless, it may be profitable to us to look for a short time at the glorious truth which is set forth in these words, the rather that it lies at the foundation of the Gospel which we believe and preach.

I. Let us attend then, first, to the person spoken of. He is called "*The Word.*" Much has been written by learned authors on the *Logos*, or Word, and various explanations of the employment of this term by the Evangelist have been suggested. Some have traced it to the Jewish Targums, which describe all those appearances of the Angel of the Lord which are recorded in the Old Testament as so many manifestations of the "Word of God." Others have alleged that its use by John is to be accounted for by the fact that Philo, a Jewish philosopher at Alexandria, spoke much in his system of the word of God; while others, like Maurice, would refer it to the frequent recurrence in the prophetical writings of the phrase, "the word of the Lord came unto him"—understanding that not of an influence, or of a communication, but of a person. It is difficult—perhaps in our present state impossible—to determine which of these, or whether any of these, is correct. All we really know on the subject is contained in the verses of which the text is the last, and on the very surface of these the following things are patent to every reader—namely, first, that the

Word was God; second, that he was yet in some way so distinct that it could be said regarding him, "he was in the beginning with God;" and third, that he was the creator of the universe. It is impossible to conceive of any stronger assertion of Deity than this, "the Word was God;" while if, as we believe, the doctrine of the Trinity is scriptural and true, we can, in some degree, understand how it can be affirmed that "the Word was with God." For the rest we may perhaps see the appropriateness of the name "Word" in the fact that he to whom it belongs is especially and peculiarly the revealer of God. Thought remains a personal possession until it is uttered in words. Thereby it becomes intelligible to others, and is apprehended by them. So Deity in the abstract is unrevealed. Only through the instrumentality of the Son has he made himself known to men, and therefore he through whom this revelation is made may be fitly termed the "Word" of God, bearing as he does to the Godhead the same relation which the spoken word does to the secret thought of the mind.

Yet we should be wrong if we were to suppose that the revelations of God through the Word began only at the birth of Christ. The universe itself was a manifestation of Godhead through the Word, for "all things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made." Hence, for all of the wisdom, power, and goodness of God that men in any age have learned from the external world, they have been indebted to the "Word." It was he who spake to them through the shining stars of night, and through the matchless splendor of the orb of day. It was his voice they heard in the storm and in the sea. It was his teaching that led them to trace to God the changing of the seasons and the course of nature gen-

erally. We talk indeed of natural as distinguished from revealed religion, and there is value in the marking of the difference between the two; but in this view of things, even that which men may learn of God from the external universe is itself a revelation made to them through him who is the "Word."

Nay, more, all those intimations of the existence and the character of God which have been given to men through conscience and the intuitions of their own souls, are here traced to the agency of this Divine Being. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." These profound utterances thus refer all the truth that men in all nations knew about God, even in the days before the advent of Christ, to the instrumentality of the "Word." This was true very clearly among the Jews. But even among the heathen there were fragments of great principles regarding God known and recognized, and these, as we learn here, were only "broken lights" of the "Word." No doubt Judaism was in a peculiar sense a preparation for Christ; but, in its own measure, and on a lower level, heathenism was a preparation for him too. Not among the Israelites alone was God's providence at work or his truth made known. Rays of his light found their way to other countries and to other hearts, and the religious rites even of pagan lands were, in their own way, what Trench has finely called them, "unconscious prophecies," which, as we see here, emanated from the "Word." Nay, even among ourselves those inextinguishable intuitions of the human soul, on which we must take our final stand in repelling the materialism of the times, by the establishment of the existence and personality of God, are emanations of that "true Light, which lighteth every

man that cometh into the world." In short, we have in the "Word" that mysterious presence of which the poet speaks as

> "Something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean, and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man."

Thus in the spiritual, as in the natural world, light came before the sun was visible. But it was light shining in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. At length, however, the time came when there was to be a fuller manifestation, and when the sun of righteousness appeared, it was seen that all the preceding brightness had been only the lustre of his own forerunning rays.

II. We are thus led to consider, in the second place, the affirmation here made regarding the Word, "*He was made flesh;*" or rather, for so the term may be more literally rendered, "*He became flesh.*" This is the manner in which John speaks of the birth of Christ. The other Evangelists give us the external facts. John gives us the soul that is beneath the facts. They tell us of the announcement made by the angel to Mary. They describe to us the scene which the shepherds saw at Bethlehem, and the visit which the Eastern sages made to lay their tribute of adoration at the feet of the infant king. John says nothing of any of these incidents, but he gives us the truth which these facts indicated, and thereby furnishes the explanation of all that was supernatural in them. Admit the assertion which John makes in my text to be a truthful description of the birth of Jesus Christ, and then everything which the other Evangelists tell about it becomes per-

fectly natural, and only what in the circumstances might have been expected. Deny the truth of that which John here affirms, and everything which they tell becomes incomprehensible. The one great miracle is the incarnation. However mysterious it may be in itself, that explains everything else in the Gospels. If the Word—who was God—became flesh, all becomes plain, and miracles cease to offer any difficulty. If there was no Word, and no incarnation of Deity, then there is no longer any Gospel, and it is not worth while to dispute about miracles.

But what is meant when it is said that the Word became flesh? Not certainly that he ceased to be the Word; but that, in addition to what he had been before, he took human nature on him. He became a man, that through his manhood he might give to men a manifestation of Deity. He took not only a human body—for that is not manhood, that is only the tabernacle in which manhood dwells—but a human nature into union with his Deity. If you ask me how that was possible, I reply, I cannot tell any more than I can explain how the soul, of which I am conscious, is united to the body, which I know to be not me but mine.

But while I cannot make the mystery plain, I can see that this union between Deity and humanity must have conditioned both. It made it necessary, on the one hand, that the humanity should be pure, and so we account for the peculiar manner of Christ's birth, wherein for him the entail of sin was broken, and his very body was a holy thing. It required, on the other hand, that his Deity should be manifested under certain limitations—for it was to be manifested through his manhood. This is what Paul refers to when he says, that "though Christ was rich, for our

sakes he became poor;" and in another connection, that "he made himself of no reputation," or as it is literally, "he emptied himself." His Deity was, in some sort, veiled by his humanity, and that explains what is said about the limitations of his knowledge, as when it is affirmed that he increased in wisdom. The incarnation to the eyes of men was a revelation of God; but to the eyes of angels it was rather, for the time, an inveiling of God; the tabernacle of the flesh curtaining, as it were, the glory of the Godhead. Still through that which to angels was a curtain, men saw more of God than they ever did before. Indeed but for the curtain they could have seen little or nothing of him at all. In looking at the sun through a telescope, if we use unstained glass the eye will be burned to the socket, and we shall see nothing; but if we employ a colored medium, we can examine it with safety. So no man can see God and live. If it were possible for a mortal to look upon the unveiled glory of the King Eternal, then might be realized indeed the words which with bold hyperbole one poet wrote of his greater predecessor:

> "The living throne, the sapphire blaze,
> Where angels tremble while they gaze,
> He saw, but, blasted with excess of light,
> He closed his eyes in endless night."

But if we contemplate him through Christ, that is, if we come to him through the medium of humanity, we behold him without being destroyed, nay, the sight of him thus imparts salvation to us; for we behold his glory as that of the only begotten, and lo it is full of grace and truth.

III. But let us advance another step, and look,

thirdly, at the proof which the Evangelist furnishes of the truth of his assertion. He says, "*we beheld his glory.*" His words thus are parallel to those of Peter, when in support of his affirmation that he was not following cunningly devised fables, he says, "we were eye-witnesses of his majesty," and then refers to the scene at the Transfiguration, and to the voice which came on that occasion from the excellent glory. But it may seem that while Peter thus brings up an incident of Christ's history in corroboration of his assertion, the allegation of John here is unsupported. That, however, is a great mistake; for the declaration of this verse is the text of his whole Gospel, and each succeeding chapter presents us with some new manifestation of the glory of the Word made flesh, of which John was an eye-witness. It is the fashion, indeed, in some quarters to decry this Fourth Gospel; and Renan, unable to get rid of its genuineness, seeks to depreciate it by calling it "the remembrances of an old man," and by speaking of "the disorder of the compilation and the irregularity of the narrative." But I wonder how any one can study its chapters with any degree of attention, and permit himself to use such language regarding it. To my view it is the most appropriate, most connected, and most convincing argument that was ever constructed. Argument, I say, for though it be in the form of a narrative, the Epistle to the Romans itself is not more closely reticulated in its logic than is the Fourth Gospel. I am aware that this may strike some of you as absurd, and may appear to others an exaggeration; yet listen, I pray you, to my unfolding of the subject, and then judge my words as you will.

John is to speak of the glory of the Word made flesh as the glory of the only begotten. But God's

revelations of himself, from the nature of the case, are simply and only presentations of himself. When he gave his name to Moses he said, "*I am.*" When Jehovah says that, then we have proof enough of his existence. The sun reveals himself by his beams, and the Son of God will reveal his Deity by this same "*I am.*" Now with that thought in your mind sit down and read this little tract with care, and you will see that the person of Christ, as revealed through his character, actions, and words, is the great theme of the writer, and that each chapter has its own place in his elaboration of the argument which goes to prove that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. In the first, he is introduced to us by John the Baptist as the Lamb of God; in the second, he is the temple of God; in the third, he is the glorious antitype of the brazen serpent; in the fourth, he says, in answer to the woman's question, "I am;" in the fifth, he is the judge of all; in the sixth, he says: "I am the bread of life;" in the seventh, he is the water of life; in the eighth and ninth, he says twice: "I am the light of the world;" in the tenth, he says: "I am the good shepherd;" in the eleventh, he says: "I am the Resurrection and the Life;" in the twelfth, he is the King of Zion riding in triumph to his capital; in the thirteenth, he is the perfect exemplar; in the fourteenth, he says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life;" in the fifteenth, he says: "I am the true vine;" in the sixteenth, he is the precursor of the Comforter; in the seventeenth, he is the great intercessor; in the eighteenth, he is, by his own solemn asseveration to Pilate, the king of a spiritual domain, whose fundamental principle is truth; in the nineteenth, he is the willing victim; and in the twentieth, he is again the Resurrection and the Life. In

fact, this may be styled the gospel of the I AM's, and when these shall be taken and set in order thus, I may surely ask if there ever was, without any formal or syllogistic display, a more masterly marshalling of arguments in favor of any conclusion than there is here, in proof of the thesis in my text, that "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us"?

But some one may say, These are mere assertions. To which I reply, No doubt; but then how otherwise than by self-assertion is God to indicate his presence? When the sun appears in the morning he simply says, "I am." And the true Godhead of Christ is nowhere more convincingly shown than in the infinite egoisms of this gospel.

Still, if any one thinks that I put this point too strongly, then let him look at the nature of these assertions, and he will see reason to conclude that he who made them, if he were no more than a man, must have been either a fool, or a fanatic, or a dealer in falsehood. But the fabric of the discourses, of which these statements form a part, proves that he who spake them was no fool. The qualities of character which came out in his conduct bear convincing witness that he was no fanatic; and the fact that the gospel which he taught produces in all its believers a desire for truth, even in the inward parts, is an infallible indication that he could not utter that which was false. Hence, on all the principles of evidence usually acted on by men in their daily lives, we must conclude that Jesus Christ has, by these "*I am's,*" displayed his Godhead before men.

But there may be some one who is still unconvinced, and to him I say, Read over with care that prayer in the seventeenth chapter, and tell me, if you can, how it came to be there? Listen to these words:

"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." "I have glorified thee on the earth." "Glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was." "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me be with me where I am." There is another of these I am's, and in some respects the most remarkable of them all, for when he used these words he was just entering Gethsemane, though very clearly they refer to the home, if I may so say, of his Deity. Now an insane man might have said these things, but then he who uttered the remainder of that prayer was evidently very far indeed from insanity, and so we cannot accept that theory. Again, a bad man *could* not have presented that prayer, for it would have been impossible for him, even by the power of imagination, to have conceived such a situation as that out of which it rose, or to have produced such pure and holy sentiments as are expressed in the supplication, when taken as a whole. But if a bad man *could* not have written it, a *good* man *would* not. For a good man on his knees is full of humility, and the better he is as a man, the farther he is from saying that eternal life for others consists, in any sense, in the knowledge of himself. Hence this prayer carries on it the indication of the fact that it came out of a unique personality, and that he who uttered it was both really God and truly man. It is impossible to account for its existence on any other principle, and therefore the disciple who overheard it might truly say, "that he beheld," the while, "the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

I have given you, in all this, only a specimen of the argument of this matchless treatise. I could not hope to exhaust it in many sermons, much less in a single dis-

course; but my object will be gained if any wavering mind among you has been established in the truth, or if you may be generally stimulated to study for yourselves the gospel which I have this morning only faintly outlined.

IV. I have left myself but little time to indicate the valuable results that flow from the reality of the incarnation, but I must crave leave to mention three:

1. The reality of Christ's Deity gave sacrificial efficacy to his death on our behalf. When we think of the death of Christ, we must remember that its importance is not only in the fact that he *died*, but also and especially in that it was *he* who died. The death of another could not have availed, but his death was efficacious. I have never seen this so clearly put as in the following sentences, by my revered tutor, John Brown, of Edinburgh, which I delight to quote, the rather as I seem to myself, the while, to see again the glance of that eagle eye, and to hear once more the tones of that ringing voice: "Jesus had a life to lay down, which could make expiation for sin and save the sheep. There never was life in the universe which could have served this purpose but his,—the life of a perfectly holy man, in union with God. The life of God could not have served the purpose; that life could not be laid down, for God lives by necessity of nature, and if that life could be laid down the consequence would be not the salvation of men, but the annihilation of the universe. The life of man could not have done it. The life even of an innocent man is God's gift, and when God calls back his gift, what merit is there in quietly, gratefully restoring it? The life of a guilty man could not do it. None could redeem his brother, none could redeem himself, for the desert in every

case was death. The life of the whole animal creation was obviously unfit to take away sin. The only life by the laying down of which expiation could be made was that of the incarnate only-begotten, the man in union with God, one whose life was his own property, and such a property as was fully adequate to the end contemplated."* Similar language and a similar argument may be found by you in the Pilgrim's Progress, in a conversation between Great-Heart and Christian, which I leave you to search out for yourselves. But what I wish you to observe is, that if such reasoning be sound, then the fact of the incarnation attests the infinite sufficiency of the atonement. Because Jesus was the Son of God, every one may sing—

> "His blood can make the foulest clean,
> His blood avails for me."

He is "mighty to save," because he is God, and when Paul challenges the universe with the question, "Who is he that condemneth?" he immediately adds, "it is *Christ* that died." That is enough, O sinner! He who died for thee was the incarnate only-begotten, and there is an infinite dignity in his person which gives unlimited sufficiency to his atonement.

2. Again, the reality of Christ's manhood assures us of perfect sympathy at his hands. "He knoweth our frame." "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses." "He has been in all points tempted like as we are." "He is an high-priest who can be touched with a feeling of our infirmities." He is a man and knoweth a man's heart. Now that is a great deal. We can always be sure that he understands our case, for

* "Discourses and Sayings of the Lord Illustrated." Vol. ii., p. 185.

though he be ascended into glory, he weareth yet our nature, and we may sing—

> "In every pang that rends our heart
> The man of sorrows has a part;
> He sympathizes with our grief,
> And to the sufferer sends relief."

This is the true tenderness of the gospel. God the unveiled overawes the sinner. When he shows his glory, as on Sinai, it has an aspect of terror to the guilty, and makes them fear and quake. But God incarnate in Jesus Christ attracts, for he comes to wipe our tears, to bind our hearts, to pacify our consciences, and to purify our lives. Macaulay never wrote more truly than when he said, "It was before Deity embodied in a human form, walking among men, partaking of their infirmities, leaning on their bosoms, weeping over their graves, slumbering in the manger, bleeding on the cross, that the prejudices of the synagogue, and the doubts of the academy, and the fasces of the lictor, and the swords of thirty legions were humbled in the dust." By his very gentleness the incarnate Son does make men great, and he who seeks for purest sympathy and richest solace must betake himself to Christ.

3. Finally, the union of the human nature to the divine in Jesus makes the resources of Deity available to us. We get at God through the manhood of Christ. He has thus added the accessibility of humanity to the omnipotence of Deity. Of what avail is a harbor of refuge to the laboring ship, if its helmsman cannot make the port? What good shall a covert do to me, if I cannot get beneath it? But now in Christ the Godhead with all its attributes is within my reach. Is it not written, "A man shall be as an hiding-place

from the wind and a covert from the tempest"? He is a man—therefore we can get to him. He is God—therefore when we are in him the shield of his omnipotence is our defence. Come, then, to him, O sinner! and he will save and bless and protect thee on earth, and share with thee his glory in the heavenly land.

PENIEL.

GENESIS xxxii. 24.—"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him, until the breaking of the day."

YEARS ago one might have been content to discourse from this text without lingering a single moment over any preliminary criticism; but, in these later days, so many theories have been propounded regarding this and similar portions of the Pentateuch, that before proceeding to the consideration of the spiritual lessons of the narrative, I feel compelled to indicate, and perhaps also, in some sort, to vindicate, the view which I have adopted of its historical character.

Let it be observed, then, that this is not the record of a vision. Some have contended that it must be regarded in this light; but if you will compare the verses which I have just read with those which describe the sleep and the vision of the patriarch at Bethel, you will see at once such a difference between the two as will prevent you from adopting the opinion that they both belong to the same category. There is not a syllable here indicating anything like a vision, and but for the miraculous character of the incidents described, no one would have thought of putting such a construction on them.

Neither, again, can the narrative contained in these verses be resolved into a myth, which, as is well known, is only a poetic fable, enshrining in it some spiritual truth. Thus regarded, the story would describe only a deep spiritual conflict in the soul of Jacob himself; while the presence of the angel, in

human form, would be discarded as fact, but would be held as indicating that there was in the heart of the patriarch at the time an intensely real sense of Jehovah's nearness to him. This is the view which has been adopted and expounded by the late Frederick Robertson of Brighton, in a sermon which is pervaded with all the freshness, fervor, and genius for which that gifted man was so remarkable. But a close attention to the narrative will convince us that such an opinion cannot be maintained, if at least we would give a fair and honest interpretation to the words before us, and seek to get at the impression which their author intended that they should convey. Besides, not to mention the fact that if you resolve this story into a myth, it will be hard to say where you are to stop, there are some features here which, to our thinking, clearly point to the conclusion that the narrative is to be accepted in its literal sense. There is, for example, the name of the place, Peniel, founded on the whole scene; and there is also that peculiar custom, prevalent among the children of Israel, of refraining from eating a certain muscle in the bodies of the animals slain for food, which is explained as having its origin in the circumstances which are here recorded. Now if a history, thus surrounded with memorial names and customs, is to be discarded, and its literal character denied, the difficulty will be to retain any portion of the sacred narrative at all. It may be said, indeed, that in parting with the history as fact, we are merely throwing away the shell, while the kernel of truth within it may be retained; but it needs to be remembered that the shell and the kernel grow together, and that the one is the God-provided protection of the other; so that we may rest assured that if we let go the historic verity of these books, they

will very soon cease to possess for us any spiritual value.

We accept, therefore, this narrative in its literal sense; we believe that a man was really there with the patriarch during that memorable night; we hold as fact that everything occurred as it is here described. If it be asked who that mysterious man was, we have no difficulty in giving the answer, for in the thirtieth verse Jacob, referring to him, says, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved;" and the prophet Hosea, alluding to the narrative before us, says,* "Jacob had power over the angel; he wept and made supplication unto him." This man, therefore, was also God, and so we conclude that he was no created angel, but rather the Angel of the Covenant, and that we have here one of those partial and temporary anticipations of the Incarnation which were given from time to time in the patriarchal and Mosaic economies, and which prepared the way for the full manifestation of the great "mystery of godliness" in human flesh.

But while contending thus earnestly for the literal and historical character of this narrative, I also most cheerfully admit, nay more, would strenuously maintain, "that though the form of this wrestling here was corporeal, the essence and the object of it were spiritual."† One must be very blind indeed if he do not see that. Jacob was in deep distress when he crossed the Jabbok that night, and recognizing the Bethel angel in the mysterious man who came to him, he threw himself on him for that help which no mere human power could render him, and cried with passionate earnestness for a blessing. No doubt,

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* Hosea, xii. 4.

† Andrew Fuller's Discourses on Genesis *in loco.*

therefore, this physical wrestling was but the agonizing of an earnest heart, which took this manner of expressing itself, from the fact that Jehovah's presence was manifested under a human form. It is in this light we shall view it now, and so, while preserving our faith in the literal character of the narrative, we get at the same time every spiritual advantage which can be derived from it. Wherefore—having brushed away all mere preliminaries from our path—let us attend for a little to the aspects of spiritual experience which this whole story sets so vividly before us.

I. For one thing, we have here a striking illustration of the loneliness of all real distress. There is a certain solitariness about every man. The proverb says that "there is a skeleton in every house," and it is equally true that there is a secret closet in every heart where the soul keeps its skeleton, and to which, after sending wife and children across the brook, it retires in times of sadness and isolation. There is something in every soul that is never told to mortal, but which, as if to make up for its being withheld from others, has a strange fascination for ourselves; and in every moment of silence it is heard sounding in our secret ear. Even those nearest and dearest to us know not of these hidden things. They are kept for solitude; nay, such is sometimes their power over us that they draw us into retirement that they may speak to us awhile.

Different exceedingly in their character may those things be that are hidden thus in the secret chamber of men's hearts. They differ in different individuals, and in the same individual at different times. In some they may be memories of guilt, as in the

case of Cain, who in dark isolation wandered o'er the earth, with the mark of God's imprinting on his forehead; in some they may be pangs of sorrow, as when David, leaving those by whom he was surrounded, went up to the solitude of the chamber over the gate of Mahanaim, and paced its floor in anguish, saying evermore, "O my son Absalom! my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!" In some they may be moments of temptation, as when Jesus went from the glories of his baptism into the wilderness, that single-handed he might confront and conquer the prince of darkness. In some they may be times of anguish, as when the same Jesus in Gethsemane withdrew from his companions and threw himself upon the ground, that he might weep, and pray, and bleed, alone.

In the case of Jacob here, guilt and suspense were the troublers of his soul. He could not forget how, years before, he had cheated Esau out of his birthright; and now he is about to meet his brother once again, and knows not whether the interview is to be one of reconciliation or of revenge. True, he has taken all proper precautions to preserve the members of his company from harm, and has used all likely means to soften his brother's heart. True, again, he has committed his case in simple fervent prayer to God; yet the suspense of his heart is such that he can endure no society for the time; so, having seen his encampment safely settled for the night, he recrosses the ford to be alone, that no one but God may overhear his soliloquy; that unrestrained by the presence of another he may unsluice his heart and let out the bitter waters of its deep anxiety.

Now we all know about this, and even as I have been speaking we have each been fingering the key

which unlocks that secret drawer in the soul's cabinet to which I have been alluding. But we may not open it now. We cannot suffer other human eyes to look upon its contents. That sin of our youth, the memory of which, like a dogging detective, has kept ever tracking our steps; that act of thoughtlessness which we committed, and which drew in its train consequences of the saddest sort which we had not for a moment dreamed of; that terrible temptation, which even now as it comes surging on seems as if it would sweep us from our foothold; that impending danger, which appears to be hanging over us like a cloud laden with electric ruin—ah! these are not themes which we can speak of at the public meeting, or to the casual acquaintance who greets us in the street; or even to our most intimate and confidential friend. But when our homes are silent and our children are at rest, when, Jacob-like, we have taken all our household over the brook, and recrossed it into solitude, then it is that they present themselves to us in their true magnitude, and when, to use the words of Robertson, "we have gone through in imagination the whole circle of our resources and found them nothing and ourselves powerless, there comes a strange, a nameless dread, a horrible feeling of insecurity, which gives the consciousness of a want and forces us to feel out into the abyss for something that is mightier than flesh and blood to lean upon."

Every real sorrow or struggle isolates us from our fellows. Just as we shall have each to die alone, so every minor suffering takes us apart from the multitude, and the keener the suffering the more thorough is the isolation. We are thus, so to say, islanded by spiritual distress, and no one may approach us thoroughly save He who erst did walk

over the very billows of their trouble, to His suffering disciples' help. We crave for human sympathy, indeed, but even at the very moment of our craving we feel how vain the longing is, for well we know our heart has a bitterness which it refuses to make known to another mortal; and when we try to give sympathy to others, what are our attempts at best but "bows drawn at a venture," inasmuch as we know not really the sufferer's woe? Ah! how many who have been compelled to listen to the consolations of others, kindly meant but far away from the mark, have felt their words fall like hailstones on their hearts, and have said like Job, "O that ye would altogether hold your peace, for that would be your wisdom"! How often, too, when we have been misjudged and misrepresented by our fellows, have we felt like Jacob here, sleepless in our solitude, and looked out through the darkness for some Peniel angel to come to our relief. There are no more weird lines in the whole round of our literature than these in the Ancient Mariner, which exactly describe the experience of which I speak :

> "Alone ! alone ! all all alone !
> Alone on the wide sea !
> * * * * * * *
> So lonely 'twas that God himself
> Scarce seemèd there to be !"

That is the very climax of distress, and only they who have themselves passed through it can fully understand the import of these words: "Jacob was left alone."

II. But the narrative before us teaches us that in this dreary solitude our only effectual resource is Incarnate God. Jacob's loneliness was not of long

continuance, for in the time of his severest need there came to him a man, whom yet by certain marks he knew to be also God, and on him, in a paroxysm of perplexity, the patriarch threw himself, crying for deliverance. It is to be remarked that this mysterious stranger, in whom God was in part concealed, and in part also revealed, presented himself to Jacob, and that he came in the form best fitted to call forth the confidence of his anguished soul. Not in the radiance of unveiled divinity does Jehovah here appear; not with those terrible outriders that went before him when he descended on Sinai does he now approach. Had he come thus, Jacob's heart would have been appalled; the fear of Esau would have been swallowed up in his terror of the Lord, and he would have fled from the awful presence. As it was, however, the patriarch saw a man, whom he could freely approach as a fellow-man; while there was that about him which made him feel that he was more than man, and that he had in him the very element of strength which at the moment he so sorely needed. Had he not come in human form, Jacob would have been driven away from him; had he been a man, and nothing more, then for the very reasons I have already advanced Jacob would still have been virtually without a helper. But now, though there is a man before him to whom he can speak with confidence, there is more than a man, even God, to whom the skeleton chamber of his heart is no secret, and who is omnipotently able to help him. Here, therefore, is the very helper whom he needs; and so he casts himself upon him and cries out for succor.

Now in all this, anticipation and prophecy as it was of the Incarnation ages after, we are reminded of the God-man Jesus Christ, and are taught in all our time

of agony and crisis to cling to him. For as this mysterious one came to Jacob, so Jesus came to earth, a human brother, and, at the same time, a divine helper. And herein does he not precisely meet our need? As a man he comes, and so we need not be afraid of him.

You know the beautiful story which Homer tells in connection with the parting of Hector and Andromache. The hero was going to his last battle, and his wife accompanied him as far as the gates of the city, followed by a nurse carrying in her arms their infant child. When he was about to depart Hector held out his hands to receive the little one, but, terrified by the burnished helmet and the waving plume, the child turned away and clung crying to his nurse's neck. In a moment, divining the cause of the infant's alarm, the warrior took off his helmet and laid it on the ground, and then, smiling through his tears, the little fellow leaped into his father's arms. Now, similarly, Jehovah of hosts, Jehovah with the helmet on, would frighten us weak guilty ones away; but in the person of the Lord Jesus he has laid that helmet off, and now the guiltiest and the neediest are encouraged to go to his fatherly embrace, and avail themselves of his support.

But while thus his humanity emboldens us to apply to him, his divinity furnishes us with the help we need. That which I cling to for strength must be something other than myself, and something stronger than myself, otherwise it will be to me as worthless as a broken reed. When in the howling hurricane wave after wave is breaking over the ship and sweeping the deck from stem to stern, it will not do for the sailor to depend upon himself; neither will it avail for him to grasp his fellow, for they may together be washed into the deep; but he lays hold of the iron

bulwark, making the strength of the iron for the moment to be as his own, and is upheld. So in the surges of agony that sooner or later sweep over every man, it will not do for him to depend upon himself, or even to hold by a fellow-mortal. He needs one who while he is a brother is mightier than any human brother; and here in Jesus Christ, the God-man, the great necessity of his heart is met; for here is the omnipotence of divinity added to the accessibility of humanity.

Nor is this all. Jesus Christ as God is omniscient as well as omnipotent. He knows, therefore, precisely what is wrong with us. The deepest recesses of our hearts are open to him. As the Danish hymn has beautifully put it,

> "What in the heart lies deepest ever,
> Unbreathed by mortal lip abroad,
> And heard by ear of mortal never,
> Takes voice before the throne of God.
> The silence of our spirit tells
> Its tale aloud where Jesus dwells."

To him, therefore, O burdened soul, repair, and he will give relief. Is it sin that is aching at thy conscience? He knows it and can give thee pardon through his sacrificial blood. Is it sorrow that is wringing thy heart? Then, though its cause may be unknown to him who sits beside thee, he is already familiar with it, and can give thee solace. Is it the fear of some impending calamity that is darkening thy spirit? He is acquainted with it, and can sustain thee through it. Is it temptation that is beleaguering thy soul? He has already seen it, and can garrison thy heart's fortress against every enemy. Is it the meeting of some offended brother, harder to be won than a city, that is weighing down thy life? He understands thy case and can give thee deliverance. Yea, brother, sister, whosoever thou

art, and whatsoever be that suffering which has to-day sent thee across the brook in solitude, Jesus Christ is thy resource, and he will give thee perfect sympathy and effectual help. To him, therefore, betake thyself. Throw thyself on him with the wailing cry of Hezekiah on thy lips, "O Lord, I am oppressed, undertake for me," and he will give thee strength.

III. But the narrative before us teaches us, farther, that our first application to this divine friend may be met with seeming repulse, but that believing importunity will ultimately prevail. From the peculiar form of expression used in the record, I gather that when this mysterious one came to Jacob, the patriarch cast himself upon him, and that then the stranger tried to shake him off. But the more he attempted to do this, the more passionately did Jacob cling to him, until at length touching the hollow of the patriarch's thigh, he deprived him of all power to stand. Not even then, however, would Jacob be gainsaid; nay rather, this paralyzing of his limbs only threw the patriarch's whole weight upon the heavenly stranger, as clinging to him with his arms, he cried, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." But this moment of extremest helplessness was at the same time that of richest victory, for just then came the answer: "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel; for as a prince hast thou power with God, and hast prevailed."

Now what have we here but an Old Testament parallel to the touching New Testament story of the Syrophenician woman. In deep anguish of soul she came to Jesus, saying, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil." But there was no response. Those ears that never before were deaf to the cry of suffer-

ing seem closed to her; those lips that never before refused to speak a word of comfort and of power to the forlorn seemed sealed to her—"he answered her not a word." But she would not be thus shaken off; she renewed her appeal so very urgently that even the disciples seem to be ashamed and say, "Send her away, for she crieth after us." To this he made reply, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." One would have thought that such a speech would have repelled her; but no, she came now nearer than ever, and fell at his feet and worshipped him, saying, "Lord, help me." To this he makes response, "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to dogs." Ah! there he touched the hollow of the thigh, and seemed almost to cast her to the earth; but no, she clings more really than ever to him, and from his very rebuff she draws a plea, as she meekly makes reply, "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master's table. I did not ask the children's bread: what I seek is but to thee as a crumb from off thy table, which even a dog may eat." Then came the commendation of her faith, as of Jacob's here: "O daughter! great is thy faith."

Nor is that a solitary New Testament instance. You have a case of the same sort when walking over the waters toward his worn-out disciples he made to pass by them, in order that he might evoke their earnest request that he should come to them. And you have another when to the two disciples, on the way to Emmaus, he made as if he would have gone farther, just that he might draw out their earnest request, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And, my brethren, has it not been so many a time with the people of God

since? We need here to be on our guard against misunderstanding the Lord. When our earnest applications to him appear to be met with indifference, when our repeated importunity seems only to call forth repeated repulse, when in the yearning earnestness of our entreaty our hearts feel as if they had lost all strength, even as Jacob's limb went from beneath him when the angel touched it, let us remember that his design is either to bring our faith to the birth, or by the discipline of resistance to develop it into greater strength, and let us cling to him all the more, saying, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." That is a wholesome weakness which throws our entire weight on Christ, for then we are in the fair way to realize Paul's paradox, "When I am weak, then am I strong."

But it is not alone for the strengthening of our faith that the answer to our application may be deferred. Jesus may design thereby to open our eyes to our real need. For observe, though it was suspense concerning Esau that was at first oppressing Jacob, there is no mention of that in this wrestling. He has discovered that he needs something far more important than reconciliation to his elder brother. He wants to know God's name, that is, his relation to him, and he desires a blessing from him. Thus through the apparent denial of the minor request he is brought to feel his need of something greater than he had thought at first of asking. Now is it not thus very frequently with God's children still? There comes to us some temporal trial, and we go across the Jabbok to cry over that; but God seems only to push us away from him, and the trial becomes heavier, until at length driven in upon our deepest need, we are constrained to ask, "What is thy name? O that thou wouldst bless me in-

deed!" The earthly emergency is forgotten in our spiritual extremity; and the higher blessings of holiness and salvation engross all our earnestness. It has been thus in the experience of many that their new life has begun in conversion, and many more have been raised by the same means to a higher platform of character than they had previously attained. So it happens that the delay of God in Christ to answer our prayers in earthly distress has been itself the beginning of his gracious answer to that constant craving for the knowledge of himself which is the deepest aspiration of every thoughtful heart. Let us give God time, and very soon, as the result of our earnestness, we shall find that while the delay has permanently benefited our own souls, the offended Esau has also been appeased. But never let us forget that if we would secure these results we must hold him fast and refuse to let him go.

IV. I hasten to add, in the last place, that such an experience as that which we have been tracing always leaves its mark on the individual who has passed through it, and renders memorable the place where it was undergone. "Jacob halted upon his thigh"—that was literal fact. But that was not the only permanent memorial of his night of wrestling which Jacob bore upon him. That was, in truth, but the corporeal indication of a spiritual result. The rocks beneath us bear the marks of the flames, to the action of which, millenniums ago, they were exposed; and in the mountain ridges of our planet we may see the record of those terrible convulsions and upheavals to which in former ages it was subjected. In like manner the spirit of a man is marked by the fires of those trials through which he has been made to pass; and we

may see in the character and disposition of an individual the indications or results of those inner struggles through which he has been brought.

Who can fail to observe the difference between Israel and Jacob? I will not venture to say that this was the night of the patriarch's conversion; but most assuredly if his spiritual life did not begin here, he was at least taught here the way of God more perfectly. He had been quickened many years before at Bethel; but we are constrained to say that when he was in the house of Laban he too largely forgot his vow, and showed not a little of that same trickery that had juggled Esau out of his birthright. No doubt, so far as Laban is concerned, it was "diamond cut diamond" between them, and one is apt to agree with Dr. Chalmers, when of the whole Padanaram settlement he says "they were a wily, politic, and deceitful set." All these years, therefore, Jacob lay stranded on the sandbank of deceit; but on this Peniel night there came such a spring-tide of devotional feeling and fervor as lifted him up and floated him off, and from this point on *the Jacob*—or supplanter—in him disappears, and the Israel comes into view. If with this thought in your mind you will read the first portion of Jacob's life up till this point, and then peruse the record of his history from this era on till his death, you will be struck with the difference between the two. Up till this chapter you are never drawn toward him. There is little about him that you can either sympathize with or approve, but after this you feel that you take a deeper interest in his welfare. He becomes more lovable, more meek, more holy, and as you read on, you are attracted to him as to a father, so that when his children stand round his death-bed to receive his dying blessing, you feel almost as if

you were one of them, and are disposed to join with them in their lamentations over him. That night of wrestling, brief as it was, left an impression on the patriarch which time, instead of effacing, only chiselled into deeper relief, and brought out in sharper outline.

And is not this just as true of men's characters today? Has not something like this been the case with ourselves, and can we not point to some crisis in our own career which has given, shall I say, that set of gait to our disposition by which its individuality is at once recognized by all around us? In the heated state of the metal the die comes down upon it, and stamps its image permanently there. It is the work of a brief space, but the impression lasts while the metal endures. So in the white heat of the soul during some time of inner agony it becomes soft and impressible, and then comes God's minting Spirit to enstamp himself upon it, making an impression which no time can obliterate and no change efface. So well understood is this by us all, that whenever we see a man of very marked Christian individuality, whether for tenderness or ruggedness, we instinctively conclude that some Peniel nights have made him what he is. Be it ours therefore, when we are in the crisis, so to bear ourselves through it that we may come forth from it, like Jacob here, purified and ennobled.

But I said also that these experiences render memorable the place where we passed through them. "Jacob called the name of the place Peniel," but he did not, as at Bethel, set up a pillar. He needed not any such outward memorial this time, for the wrestling of the night had burned its remembrance indelibly upon his heart, and many a time in his later life would he look back with gratitude on the blessing which he there received. But we know little of religious experience

if we cannot point to similar places in our own careers where in a very special manner God in Christ has come to us with strengthening and cheer. It may be our closet or study; it may be the corner of the street car or the bench of the railway carriage; it may be the shore of the far-resounding sea, or the sweet rural valley; or, as in the case of a dear friend of mine, the foot-walk of the crowded city streets. Years ago, while walking arm and arm through the city of Glasgow with a fellow-student, now a minister of Christ, he stopped me and said: "Do you see that court-yard there, with the archway entrance into it? I remember when I was in a manufacturer's establishment in this city I was sorely tempted to do what I knew to be dreadfully wrong, and I had almost yielded; I was sent out on a message, and being again assailed by the temptation, I turned into that entry, and there, beneath the arch, I took out my little pocket New Testament and opened it. In the good providence of God my eye fell upon these words: 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able: but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.' I was enabled to take hold of the hand he thus held out to me, and now as I pass the place I call it my Peniel, for I saw God face to face, and my life was preserved." Brethren, these places mark our progress heavenward. They are battle-fields whereon Christ enabled us to overcome self and sin, and they are memorable to the soul, as its Leipzigs, its Waterloos, its Gettysburgs, each having its own peculiar glory and all leading up to that blessed state where our conflicts shall be over, because the final victory has been won.

Thus have I extracted from this precious history some of the teachings which it suggests. I have left

more than I have taken, for no matter what passage of Scripture one selects for meditation, he will find that it is with him as with the disciples when the Lord brake the loaves and fishes, and the fragments that remain after the feast will be greater than the repast which was first served appeared to be. I cannot conclude, however, without observing that in this night spent by Jacob on the other side of the brook, one may see without any great strain of imagination a kind of picture of our earthly life as a whole; for what is our life but wrestling in the dark with difficulties and perplexities all leading up to this great central question, "What is thy name, O God, and how shall I gain a blessing from thee?" To these inquiries an answer has been given by the Lord Jesus Christ; it is only as yet a partial answer, and suggests itself a great many new questions, but it is an answer sufficient for our present need. We shall know the rest when the day breaketh. Death shall bring a light that will make many mysteries plain, provided all through life we hold by Jesus and refuse to let him go. Men speak of death indeed as night; but to the Christian it is dawn. Thus let us think of it, and let us sing this prayer:

"Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes,
Shine through the gloom and light me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death O Lord, abide with me."

THE ATONEMENT.

COLOSSIANS. i. 20.—"And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven."

THESE words open up to us a wide range of inquiry, in the prosecution of which our intellects lose themselves, not so much, however, because of any obscurity in the subject, as because of the limited nature of our faculties themselves. Yet although we must, for the present at least, despair of fully understanding the teaching of the apostle here, we must not, on that account, allow ourselves to be deterred from examining it, as far as we are able to do so. Indeed it is only by prosecuting our investigation to the utmost that we can form any adequate conception of the grandeur of the idea which Paul has here expressed. We shall not be able to make a voyage of discovery across this vast ocean, but we may coast along its shore, and learn thereby something of its glory; or, if we cannot do even that, we can stand upon the beach and look out over its waters; we can pick up a few of the pebbles that lie upon its "glittering strand," or taking up one of the shells at our feet, we can put it to our ear and hear its solemn echoes of the wondrous sounds that roll, in ceaseless music, far away in the unfathomed depths of this wide sea.

The great subject here brought before us is the reconciling influence of the blood of the Redeemer's cross; and, in examining the words of the text, it is

needful to remember that they stand in intimate connection with those that go before them, so that the phrase, "it pleased the Father," must be supplied from the beginning of the 19th verse, and read in immediate relation to the statement made in the 20th, thus: "It pleased the Father, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself." The whole reconciliation is thus traced up to its source in the pleasure of the Father. It originated in his love; it emanated from his heart. He did not give his Son in order that he might love the world, but because he loved it, and because he desired that the world might love him. Now in working toward that result he began by "making peace through the blood of the cross" of his Son, and that having been accomplished, he goes on, through the Son, whose blood has made peace, to reconcile all things unto himself. In the text, therefore, as thus analyzed, we have the influence of the blood of the cross as it respects God, as it respects man, and as it respects that class of intelligences whom the apostle has here designated "things in heaven." To each of these let me endeavor briefly to direct your attention.

I. We have here, first, the influence of the blood of the cross as it respects God. "It pleased the Father, having made peace through the blood of his cross." Now, very evidently, the "peace" here cannot mean the actual reconciliation of men to himself, for it is represented as something which he had made prior to, and with the distinct design of afterwards effecting that reconciliation. It was not "peace" with man which God made through the blood of Christ, for, as we learn here, the reconciliation to himself of "things in earth" by God, is something different from, and

indeed consequent upon, the peace which was effected on the cross by the atoning sacrifice of Christ. But if it were not peace with man that was made thus through the blood, it must have been "peace" that looked toward God himself, for he is the only other party to the existing enmity. The conclusion, therefore, is, that Paul is speaking of the peace-making effect which the blood of the cross produced, shall I say, on God himself?

Now what precisely was that? Clearly it could not be a change in God himself, or in his purposes, for he is immutable. Just as clearly it could not be any alteration in his feelings in reference to sin, for that is and must always be "the abominable thing which he hates." Still less could this peace be the purchase of his love for man, for, as we have already seen, the whole purpose of reconciliation sprang out of the pleasure of the Father, and the atonement is the consequence and not the cause of the divine love to men. What then is this peace? I answer, It is the effect produced by the death of Christ upon the moral government of God, so that it became possible for him righteously to forgive the believing sinner, and receive again into his family the returning prodigal. The offering up of himself by Christ upon the cross for sinners of mankind, so satisfied the claims of the divine law, and magnified the honor of the divine justice that on the ground of that propitiation God could be at once merciful and just in the pardoning of sin. The peace here spoken of, therefore, is peace with the law and justice of God, and that, as we gather from the phraseology of the text, had to be made before it was possible for God to reconcile any sinner to himself, even "by Christ."

Nor is this the only place in which our apostle

has made such an assertion. The same thing comes out when, in writing to the Romans, he speaks of "Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth," and though it is not directly expressed, the same idea is involved in the declaration that "God made him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." So also the apostle John alleges that Jesus Christ is "the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world," and in the immediate neighborhood of that affirmation declares that "if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Now, if we have been correct in our reasoning here, from the statements of the New Testament, and if the death of Christ had a propitiatory influence Godward, such that it made it possible for God righteously to justify a believing sinner, then two inferences may be drawn having a direct bearing on some prevalent opinions on this important subject:

1. It will follow, first, that they are greatly in error who maintain that the only purpose of the death of Christ was to reconcile man to God, by the simple manifestation of the divine love. Now here, of course, we admit, nay, contend, that the death of Christ is a manifestation of love. Never, indeed, was there any act in which love was so conspicuous. But there must have been something else in that death than an expression of love, otherwise there could not have been any love in it at all. To die upon a cross is a dreadful ordeal to undergo; but the penitent thief died upon a cross as well as Christ; why, then, do I speak of Christ's death as a manifestation of love to me,

while I have no such idea regarding him who hung by his side? The answer is apparent: It is because Christ endured that death in order that the way might be opened up for my forgiveness as a righteous act by Jehovah. But take away this result of Christ's death as affecting God's law and justice, and what, I ask, is the crucifixion of Christ to me more than the death of any man? Where was the love in it to the human race, if it did not make that possible which otherwise was impossible, namely, the salvation of the sinner righteously? It is time to be done with sentimentalism on this subject, and to affirm that self-sacrifice, merely as such, and without reference to the object for which the sacrifice is made, has in it nothing that is either laudable or lovable. It is rashness and it may be suicide for one to leap over the bulwarks of the ship far out on the wide Atlantic; but if one have fallen overboard, and another leaps to his assistance, and with the arm of a strong swimmer bears him up until he is fairly rescued, that is heroism. What is the principle of the difference between the two? It is in the fact that in the one case there was no object to be gained, while in the other there was a life to be saved. Now, let us apply this illustration to the matter in hand: If there were an object to be secured by the death of Christ, which could not otherwise have been attained; if, for example, that death satisfied law (even as in the illustration I have just used the swimmer satisfied the law of gravitation), so that sinners might be honorably pardoned, then there was the manifestation in it of infinite love. But if there was no necessity for that death on other grounds, then there was no love to sinners in the dying. Hence they who deny that Christ's death is in any sense a satisfaction of divine justice, or has any effect on the

divine side, or was in any way necessary to secure human forgiveness, do also eliminate from it that very element of love on which they so delight to expatiate.

The truth is that there are two elements in the cross, each of which is indispensable to the presence of the other, and both of which are necessary to give the sinner peace. These are love and righteousness, and neither ought to be allowed to overshadow or eclipse the other. We must not exalt the love without making mention of the righteousness, for, as we have seen, if there were no righteousness making the death imperative in order to the salvation of men, it is hard to see how there could be love in the dying. But neither must we exalt the righteousness in such a way as to obscure the love. In the one case the gospel will be made to wear an aspect of indifference to evil, and men may fall into the mistake of saying, "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound." In the other the gospel will be made to assume an appearance of terror which will cause men exceedingly to fear and quake. But when we give each element its proper proportion, the love attracts to God and the righteousness restrains from sin. Let us hold fast therefore by them both, and say regarding them, "Those things which God hath joined together let no man put asunder."

2. But if our reasoning regarding the peace spoken of in my text be correct, it follows further that they are greatly in error who make little of the death of Christ. There is a tendency among many in these days to ignore, if not indeed to depreciate, "the dying of the Lord Jesus." They tell us that "blood" has no meaning for them. They affirm that the term "sacrifice" is a figure which might have significance for the Jews, who were brought up under a system in which sacrifices were common; but that it has no sig-

nificance for us, and therefore, as an illustration is worthless when it has ceased to illustrate. They allege that it would be just as well for us to say that we are saved by Christ, as that we are saved by his death. Now it would be easy to show the superficialness of all such assertions. For example, was Abel a Jew? Had he been brought up under a long-continued and venerable sacrificial system when he brought to Jehovah the firstlings of his flock? And were they merely Jews, or was it the whole race of men that God meant to educate into the truth that "without shedding of blood there is no remission of sins," when "he had respect to Abel and to his offering, but to Cain and to his offering he had not respect"? Again, was it not to a Gentile church the apostle was writing when he said, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins," and when he affirmed that he was determined "to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and *him crucified*"? Why this emphasis on the crucified? Was it not because glorious as Jesus Christ was as incarnate God, he yet could have no saving relationship to men if he had not died for them? But what need I more? Refer to the verse which I have this morning taken as my text, and you will see at a glance that in the estimation of the inspired apostle this blood of the cross was the means of making any effort at reconciliation, even through Christ, possible. So, they who despise the cross and depreciate the blood of him who died thereon for human guilt, are out of sympathy with the great apostle, and are guilty of trampling under foot the blood of the covenant as an unholy thing. Turn away, I beseech you, from that gospel in which there is no cross! Let no philosophy, falsely so called, beguile you from the truth that "in Christ we

have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins." Let no vague declamation or gilded rhetoric commend to you a system which makes the cross a mere incident, not to say accident, in redemption, instead of its grand procuring cause! "The blood is the life"—and when its peace-speaking efficacy is ignored, the life of the ministry, the power of the pulpit, ay, and the abiding peace of the heart also will disappear.

II. We come now in the second place to consider the influence of the blood of the cross as it respects man. The phrase "things in earth" may perhaps be taken in a more comprehensive sense, and the apostle here may be alluding to that of which he speaks elsewhere, when he affirms that the whole creation "is waiting for the redemption," and "groaning and travailing in pain together until now." But, while the reconciliation may extend thus literally to all "things in earth," it can do so only through mankind. The curse passed through man upon the earth, and the blessing must do the same. We shall not, therefore, narrow the meaning of the words before us, if we take them as primarily applicable to man.

Now here the question becomes, How are men through Christ reconciled to God? We have seen how, by the blood of the cross, God's justice is honored even in the forgiveness of the believing sinner. But more than the pardon of the guilty one is needed to a perfect coming together between God and man, for sin has not only broken the divine law, but also filled the sinner's heart with enmity against Jehovah; and hence, even after the law has been satisfied, it is requisite that this enmity shall be removed, and that love and confidence shall take its place. Now, just

here comes in the reconciling influence of Christ—for through his perfect atonement for sin he has secured the agency of the Holy Spirit for the regeneration of the hearts of men; and in the story of his love and death he has furnished that Divine Being with the most effective instrument for working upon the human soul.

He has, I say, by his atoning death secured the agency of the Holy Spirit for the regeneration of men's hearts. When the soldier pierced the side of Jesus, there came forth blood and water; the blood the symbol of atonement, and the water the emblem of the Holy Ghost. These two are the complements of each other—the one without the other would be ineffective. Without the atonement there could have been no descent of the Holy Spirit; without the Holy Spirit, the atonement would not have availed to change the disposition of men in reference to God. The atonement satisfies God's justice; the Spirit removes the enmity of the sinner's heart. The atonement makes amends for the wrong we had done to the divine law; the Spirit repairs the injury which by our sins we have inflicted upon our own souls. No power but his can remedy the ruin which we have wrought upon ourselves; and Christ, by his death on our behalf, has secured his agency for that purpose. An old legend tells that during the hours of the Saviour's Passion a dove alighted, to rest awhile upon his cross. The story may be fable, but there is a truth lying beneath it as a symbol, for, as Keble has put it in his Christian Year,

"The Spirit must still the darkling deep;
The dove must settle on the cross;
Else we should all sin on, or sleep,
With Christ in view,—turning our gain to loss."

But further, the reconciliation of man to God is through Christ, because the story of his love and death is the great instrument which the Spirit employs in removing from the human heart its enmity against God. It is the proof to which he points for the assertion that God loves men. All along the sinner has been misjudging God. He has been counting him an hard master, and has been harboring evil thoughts against him. He has misunderstood his greatest kindnesses, and misinterpreted his richest mercies; so that even the blessings of God have only offered new occasion for his doing him dishonor. But when by the Holy Ghost his eyes are opened to see that God has actually given up his own Son to death on the behalf of sinners, he discovers that he has been doing him the foulest wrong, and he returns in penitence and affection to his Father's house. The cross of Christ, as thus illuminated by the Holy Spirit, is the meeting-place between the sinner and his God. All this way the Father has come running to receive his prodigal; and when the son sees the love which the Father there has manifested, he exchanges the disposition of a servant for that of a child, the enmity of a rebel for the affection of a son. The love has broken him down. The infinite sacrifice at which his pardon has been secured has constrained him to make himself a sacrifice to God, and he is drawn by the divine magnetism of the cross to follow after that holiness "without which no man shall see the Lord."

The love of God as manifested in the life and death of Christ for sinners is thus the great instrument the Spirit uses in the conversion of men. Nay, it is the only instrument which he employs. You have heard the story of the first Moravian missionaries in Greenland: how for long years they labored in the inculca-

tion of abstract principles, and saw no fruit, and how, when one of their number was reading the story of the Saviour's death, he saw the tears stand in his hearers' eyes, and heard them cry, "Why did you not tell us this before? Tell us it again." And similar results may be seen at home; for if we will only look around and ask ourselves who they are whose preaching is most largely blessed, and on whose lips thronging multitudes hang with the most eager attention, we shall find that they are those who most simply and earnestly proclaim salvation through the love of Him who died for us upon the cross. It was well said by Angell James, himself one of the most successful soul-gatherers the Church has ever seen, "Raise me but a barn under the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral, and give me a man who shall preach Christ crucified with something of the energy which the all-inspiring theme is calculated to awaken, and you shall see it crowded with warm hearts; while in the statelier building hard by, if that gospel be not preached there, the matins and vespers shall be chanted only to the statues of the mighty dead." Brethren, this witness is true, and if we would draw men to God we must seek to have these two essential elements of attraction—first the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and second, the faithful preaching of the cross of Christ—as the manifestation of God's love, in the securing of righteous forgiveness to the believing sinner. The honoring of the Holy Ghost in the closet, and the uplifting of the cross in the pulpit—give us these again as they were combined on the day of Pentecost, and we shall see again thousands converted in a day.

III. But I hasten to glance for a few moments, in the third place, at the influence of the blood of the cross as

it respects those who are here styled "things in heaven." And here, the first thing to be settled is, what these things are. Some would interpret the phrase of the whole intelligent universe, and speak of the inhabitants of other worlds as interested in the grand results of the Atonement. And doubtless if there be such intelligences, they must be ultimately interested in the cross. The plain of Marathon was of small account in the Morea, until the battle was fought there which secured the liberty of Greece. The field of Waterloo was little regarded among those of Europe, until the conflict was fought there which crushed the ambition of Napoleon. And so our earth, little though she be among the countless worlds that gem the midnight sky, is yet exalted in importance, as the battle-ground of the universe, whereon sin and Satan have been vanquished by Him who died upon the cross. In the success of that conflict every holy being is interested, and so, if there be inhabitants in those other planets, I should certainly not think of excluding them from the phrase before me. But still I believe that the special reference of the words is to the angelic host, who are elsewhere represented as most interested spectators of the great work of Redemption, and who in the Book of Revelation are spoken of as joining in the song, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing."

But how, it may be asked, can they be said to be reconciled to God through Christ? Now, in answer to this inquiry, it must be admitted that, as the angels have never sinned, we cannot use the word "reconcile" in reference to them, in the same precise sense as we employ it when we speak of man. But the great work of human redemption through the death

of Christ has let them see farther into the heart of God than they ever saw before. Thus it has brought them nearer to him, and given them a higher degree of blessedness. Now such an increase in their blessedness may be called a "reconciliation," in comparison with the greater distance at which they formerly stood from him, and the lower degree of happiness which they formerly possessed. Sinless though they were from the first, the work of Christ on behalf of men has opened up to them new visions of Jehovah's glory, and lifted them up into a higher fellowship with him; and so, though they cannot be said in the very strictest sense to be reconciled, the word may be employed regarding them in a lower and less absolute signification. The meaning of the verse may thus be given in the words of Alford: "All creation subsists in Christ, all creation, therefore, is affected by his act of propitiation; sinful creation is in the strictest sense reconciled from being at enmity; sinless creation, ever at a distance from his unapproachable purity, is lifted into nearer participation and higher glorification of him, and is thus reconciled, not in the strictest sense, yet in a very intelligible and allowable one."

As we contemplate these transcendent results, how does the glory of the cross grow upon us! O that wondrous cross! the meeting-place and reconciler of so many opposites! Here God's mercy and God's justice are seen in conspicuous harmony. Here God and man are reconciled. Here man and man embrace each other and become eternal brethren! Here earth is bound to heaven, and they together are drawn nearer to God. O wondrous cross on which the Prince of Life did shed his blood! The brightest majesty of created excellence grows pale before thy blaze of glory!

Thus have I attempted to bring before you some of the truth contained in this comprehensive text. That I have not brought more has been owing to the excessive brightness of the subject which dazzled my eyes as I tried to gaze steadily upon it. Enough, however, has been said to give us a nobler estimate of the cross, and of Him who died thereon for the sins of men. Its full glory and His it will require eternity to unfold, and haply, as we commune together before the throne regarding it, we may marvel at the poor stammering fashion in which it has been spoken of to-day.

I cannot let you go, however, without giving utterance to two deeply important inferences from this whole subject.

1. All obstacles have been taken out of the way of the sinner's salvation, so far as God is concerned. He is reconciling men to himself, and if they are not reconciled, it must be because they are unwilling to be so. He draws men to him, he does not drag them. And if any do not go to him it must be because they resist his overtures. This is how it comes, that though he is reconciling all, all are not reconciled to him, for he does not demolish human freedom, but leaves the matter in the last resort to the individual will. O sinner! there is nothing to hinder thy salvation now, but thine own want of inclination. If a man is not saved, it is not because Christ's work has been imperfectly performed, or because his sins are too great for Christ's blood to wash away, or because the aid of God's Spirit is denied him; but it is because he will not come unto Christ, that he may have life. This is the great, the only hindrance. The whole question is, "Art thou willing to be reconciled to God through Christ?" Oh, that dreadful power of willing which God has

conferred upon us, and how inconceivably awful the thought that eternity depends thus upon our choice! We cannot rid ourselves of this responsibility; it links itself on to our very being; you cannot choose for me, nor I for you, and eternity depends upon it. There it hangs, O sinner! trembling now in the balance of thy will. What is thy choice to be?

2. Finally, if thou passest from earth unreconciled, there is no salvation for thee. Observe, there is no mention here of "things under the earth." In another passage, where Paul is speaking of the unlimited supremacy of Jesus, he includes "things under the earth;" but very significant is the omission here, for the cross, which on earth is a magnet to attract the sinner to his God, will there repel the condemned one further from his presence. The cross, which here holds open for men the door of mercy, will there become the bolt that bars it against the impenitent. Whilst then thou art on earth, O sinner! come to the cross, and there "acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace with him." "As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."

MISPLACED ANXIETY.

JOHN xxi. 22.—"What is that to thee? Follow thou me."

WHAT a unique individuality the Four Evangelists have given to the Apostle Peter! No matter which of them describes him, we recognize the same impulsive, wayward, impetuous man: at one moment trying the patience of his friends by his rash and blundering forwardness, at another extorting their admiration by the boldness of his utterances, or awakening their sympathy by the sincerity of his sorrow for his faults. He was "the irrepressible" among the twelve. He thought aloud, and those things which more prudent or reserved persons would have kept to themselves he spoke right out, without taking time to consider their bearing either on himself or others. Like a gun which has an awkward tendency to go off prematurely, he was forever exploding into some expression of enthusiasm or some act of folly. Scarcely has he been commended by the Saviour for his noble confession, when he is met by the reproof, "Get thee behind me, Satan!" for suggesting that the cross was unworthy of the Christ. Hardly has he begun his walk upon the waters, when he cries in the helplessness of a sinking one, "Lord save me, I perish;" while so swiftly did his pendulum soul swing from one extreme to another, that the words "Thou shalt never wash my feet" had not well crossed his lips before he added, "Lord, not my feet only, but my hands and my head." A similarly rapid alternation from one extreme to

another is seen in his denial of the Lord, which came so soon after his protestation of his willinghood to lay down his life for the Redeemer's sake, and which was followed in its turn by that violent outburst of repentance when "he went out and wept bitterly."

Yet with all his imperfections Peter had the love of those who were his daily companions. His faults were on the surface, and were seen at a glance; his good properties were a hidden well, out of whose depths his friends continually drew, and by whose waters they were revived and refreshed. Hence, in spite of the blemishes by which he was characterized, his fellow-disciples held him in high honor, and it was in no spirit of jealousy toward him that John wrote the touching appendix to his Gospel from which my text is taken. Rather it was added to the main narrative to show to all succeeding generations how thoroughly Peter was restored by the Saviour to the position which his sin had forfeited; and to commend thereby the riches of that grace by which, after so great a fall, he had been so completely and so lovingly re-established among the apostles.

But how like Peter it all is! Even if his name had not been mentioned we could not have doubted that it was he who cast himself off so impetuously into the sea, in his eager haste to greet the Lord, whom he saw upon the shore. Who but he could have made thrice that ardent answer to the inquiry, "Lovest thou me?" And after he had heard the terrible prediction of the manner of his death, who but he could have asked with an affection for John that swallowed up all consideration for himself, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" Hence to one who has intelligently studied the disposition of Peter as it comes out in the other portions of the gospel history, this evan-

gelic epilogue carries the stamp of truthfulness on its very face, for it is the son of Jonas all over!

Not less remarkably, however, does the individuality of Jesus stand out in this wonderful chapter. The revelation of his presence through the miracle of the fishes; the searching character of his appeals to Peter; the touching care for the lambs of his flock which comes out in the repeated commission which he gives to his servant; the tender pathos that trembles through his description of the manner in which the apostle was to die; and above all, perhaps, the firm faithfulness by which he repressed the too-eager curiosity of his disciple, all reveal to us the presence of Jesus, so that, though his name is not mentioned by himself, we instinctively exclaim with John, "*It is the Lord.*"

The question which I have selected as my text at this time, and which is thus equally related to the characteristics of Peter and of the Lord, is full of profitable suggestiveness. Our Master encouraged his followers to come to him with all their difficulties. But he exercised a divine discretion in the answers which he gave. Sometimes, as in the case of their inquiry relative to the origin of the blindness of him whose eyes were opened at the pool of Siloam, he gave them a direct reply, which corrected misapprehension and removed error. Sometimes, as in the instance of parabolic interpretation, he entered into the fullest explanations with them. But when their questions sprang out of an idle curiosity, or from the mere desire to have some ingenious speculation settled, he turned them aside either with some quiet reproof or with some practical admonition. Thus, when they asked him, "Are there few that be saved?" he gave no direct reply, but said, "Strive ye to enter in at the strait gate;" and when they inquired, "Lord, wilt

thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" he made answer, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." In like manner, when Peter wished to know something of John's future career, he said, not in flippancy, or by way of making a smart retort, but in solemnity and earnestness, "If I will that he should tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me." Now beneath all these answers there lies this one principle, namely, that we should not allow the difficulty of questions, for the solution of which we are not responsible, to keep us from doing the plain duty that is at our hands. Here is a clear obligation resting upon us to "follow Christ," to "strive to enter in at the strait gate." These things have to be done by us if we would be saved ourselves, and so it is folly to let our minds be preoccupied with the settlement of difficulties which we never can solve, and for the existence of which we are not in any sense accountable, and thus incapacitate ourselves for the great work and business of our lives. The practical which lies before us, which we can accomplish, and for the accomplishment of which we shall be held responsible, that is the important thing for us. The speculative, the unrevealed, the insoluble, that belongs to God; and if we would have the greatest enjoyment in our lives, and make the best out of them for ourselves and others, we shall leave that to God, and be content to work in our own little portion of the pattern of history, in ignorance of its bearing upon the rest, and in faith that if we follow Christ it will all come right at last.

In my student days I had a very intimate friend, who was pre-eminently successful in gaining prizes by written competition. So surely as he went in for

any particular subject, whether classics, philosophy, or mathematics, he came out first. In the general work of the classes and in the recitations he did not appear to be any better than his neighbors; but at a written examination he was "*facile princeps.*" At the end of our course I asked him to explain this to me, and he revealed his secret thus: "You take the questions in the paper as they come; hence, if the first question is a very hard one, you spend, perhaps, the whole time allotted for the paper upon that; but when I get a paper into my hand, I read over all the questions, pick out those that I see I can answer at once, and then having disposed of them, and made sure that they will count, I go on to the harder ones. I pass through the plain ones to the difficult, and I take care always to do the one before I attempt the other." There was great wisdom in the plan, and in the college of life more of us, I imagine, would come out prizemen at the last, if we were to let the hard things of speculation alone, at least until we have performed the plain duties which our Saviour has set before us. But if this be so with the "hard" things, how much more does it hold of those things which are insoluble by mere human reason. Yet how many there are among us who make difficulties, for the existence of which they are not responsible, and for the removal of which they are incompetent, a reason either for their refusing to follow Christ, or for following him only afar off. Let me illustrate.

I. Take first the mysteries that lie outside of revelation altogether. It is a common impression, indeed, that it is only when we open the Bible that we come into contact with difficulty. But that is not the case. Rather, I think, it could be shown that many of those

things in revelation which perplex men have already emerged in another form in nature and providence. But whether that be so or not, it is beyond question that in life we are surrounded with mystery. There is—darkest of all and brooding over all—that great enigma the existence of evil under the government of a wise, a holy, and a loving God. Now revelation did not make that difficulty. It found it already existing; and while it shows us a way of escape from evil, it does not attempt to solve the mystery of its existence. Neither can we solve it. But then we are not asked to do so, and we are not responsible for it. It was there when we awoke to mental and moral consciousness, and we found ourselves also tainted with its leprosy. How it came there is not our affair; but how we may rid ourselves of its defilement, that is for you and me the question of questions. Just there, however, the Lord Jesus comes with his salvation. He shows us how through faith in him as the all-sufficient sacrifice for sin, and through following him as the great teacher and Lord of our souls, we may be delivered from evil and its consequences. Now in these circumstances what madness it would be if we should turn away from the remedy which he has provided, and waste our lives in the fruitless endeavor to find out the origin of the disease. When we have extinguished the fire, it will then be in order to hold an inquest for the discovery of the manner in which it originated; but while it is blazing away, "All hands to the fire-engines!" that we may stop its devastation. When we have rescued the drowning man, it may be proper enough to examine how he came to be in the water; but our present duty is to get him out. Therefore let us throw him a rope, or a life-buoy, or put out for him in a boat. So, to obtain deliverance from the evil that is in our

own hearts, and then to banish it from the world through the power of the Lord Jesus, is our first duty. Let us attend to that with undivided souls. If we can do nothing else with the question of the entrance of sin into the universe, we can at least let it alone. It is not our matter, and we can say regarding it, "What is that to me? I follow Christ."

Then akin to that great difficulty which I have just alluded to, is the perplexity which in many minds is occasioned by the anomalies not unfrequently presented by God's providence. Generally speaking indeed we can have no hesitation in admitting that God's government of the human race is moral, that is to say, that it is carried on in such a way as to give prominence to the great attributes of justice, truth, and righteousness. And yet the prosperity of the wicked is by no means unknown, and the adversity and suffering of the good are not things entirely unheard of. Nay, sometimes as one looks around it seems as if, in this matter, character were of no importance; and if he have been striving unsuccessfully to gain prosperity with a good conscience he may be tempted to say, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency."

That old debate which waxed so hot between Job and his friends in the far land of Uz, has emerged anew in some form or other in every individual heart and in every successive generation. It has never received fuller or more exhaustive treatment than it had at the hands of these Eastern sages. Yet virtually they left it where they found it. Jehovah appeared to them at the close asserting his sovereignty, and claiming his right to veil himself in clouds and darkness. He asked them to confide in his wisdom, and to leave the matter in his hands. And what far-

ther can we get than that? We are not responsible for the government of the world. It is not ours to sit upon the throne. We may well leave the vindication of God's workings to God himself. He will take care of his own honor. Meanwhile for us there is the lowlier province of working out our own salvation with fear and trembling, under the assurance that "it is God who worketh in us, to will and to do of his good pleasure." To us the gospel has been preached, and for the use we make of that we shall be held to account. To us the Saviour has said, "Follow me," and for the answer we give to that earnest call we shall be responsible. We cannot unravel the perplexities of providence, but we can see the way of life which Christ has made so plain that no one can mistake it; shall we then turn away from the pressing duty of the present state, and the open gate which Jesus has set before us, and give up our energies to such fruitless quests as that which Solomon has described in his book of Ecclesiastes, or such profitless philosophy as that of him who would bind the millstone of fatalism round the neck of humanity? No! no! Let us work in the light we have, little though it may be; and as we follow it, we shall be led to Him who is the fountain of light. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord."

Very dark, indeed, many occurrences around us seem to be. The crowded vessel freighted with trusting passengers goes to pieces, amid the fog, on the ragged reef, and hundreds are hurried to a watery grave; the little child, scarcely out of the laughing glee of infancy, is battered to death by a brutal ruffian; the devout worshippers in a crowded church are caught in the arms of the devouring fire, and some are burned and some are trampled to death. These are a few, taken almost

at random, from recent events, and as one muses on them he becomes completely lost. "These things happening under a God of mercy and love and justice! Why do they occur?" So we cry, and then there comes the answer, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Christ." Be sure that in the long run God will be "his own interpreter, and he will make it plain;" meanwhile follow Christ. The love revealed through him will help you to believe that even in these dreadful things somehow love is hidden; and the spirit which Christ imparts will stir you up to sympathize with and relieve all suffering and sorrow with which you come into contact. Do not brood over the mystery. Follow rather in the footsteps of Him who came to earth, not to make all perplexities plain, but to mitigate the miseries, and soothe the sorrows, and remove the sin of men. Turn your face to the Sun of Righteousness, and the mystery shadow will fall behind you and cease to trouble you.

II. But let us see how the principle of my text may be applied, secondly, to those mysteries which spring out of revelation. To the superficial thinker it seems anomalous that in a communication made by God to men any difficulties should present themselves. But when we go more deeply into the subject, it will appear that mystery is inseparable from a revelation given by a higher to a lower intelligence. Your child asks you for an explanation of something which has puzzled him, and you give him an answer suited to his comprehension; but the result is that your reply, though it be perfectly correct and intelligible from your stand-point, has started in his mind a whole crop of new perplexities which you cannot enable him to understand. The greater light which you have

given him has brought him at so many more points into contact with the darkness, that he is in some respects more distressed than before, and begins to understand the wise man's words, "He that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." Now something like that occurs in our reception of the revelation which God has given us. The cry of our humanity was this, "How shall man be just with God?" and in reply God has pointed us to Him whom he "hath set forth to be a propitiation for sin through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness, that he might be just, and yet the justifier of him that believeth." He hath shown us his own eternal Son in human nature, bearing the sin of the world, and offering himself a ransom for men, and he has proclaimed that "whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." It is a precious declaration, giving hope and joy and life to the believer; but how many new difficulties it has started! at how many more points has it confronted us with the unknown and the unknowable! Thus it brings us face to face with the mystery of the Trinity. It suggests to us the great problem of the Incarnation. It starts within us such questions as these: How can there be this unity in trinity? How could the infinite God tabernacle in a human body? Wherein was the necessity for the suffering and death of him who took upon him to deliver men? What was there in the death of Christ, on our behalf, that specially affected the government of God and the consciences of men? How can the Spirit of God work in and on a human soul, without doing violence to that freedom which is the crowning glory of its constitution?

These and a hundred other similar inquiries crowd upon us as we read the Gospels and Epistles of the

New Testament, and there is not one in this audience, come to years of maturity, who has not at some stage of his mental and spiritual development been arrested by them. Nay, perhaps, there are some among us who have never got away from them, and who, caught in the meshes of the perplexities which they have occasioned, are to-day precisely where they were years ago. They have not "followed Christ," they have not joined his Church, they have not begun to grow in true nobility and holiness of character, because they have not been able to thread their way through the labyrinth of difficulties in which such questionings have involved them.

Now how shall we deal with such anxious ones? I answer, in the spirit of the principle which underlies my text. These questionings are not in our department. They have reference to matters which belong to God. We are not responsible for them. It may be that it is just as impossible for God himself to make them plain to us, as it is for us to render something which is incomprehensible to our child intelligible to him. Still, as we ask our child to confide in us, he asks us to confide in him, and shall we not trust him, especially when all these mysteries respect his nature and actings, and have in them nothing that can prevent us from doing our plain and simple duty? It is not required of us to understand the infinite. Only God can comprehend God. What we are commanded to do is to follow Christ. That is within our power. That is on the plane of our daily finite existence. That, therefore, we ought to do at once, and with all our hearts. "Secret things belong unto God, but unto us belong the things which are revealed." Let us only be certain that the gos-

pel is from God—and I see not how any one can calmly and candidly investigate the character and work of Jesus Christ without coming to that conclusion—then we may safely venture on the Lord Jesus for our salvation, and follow him as our guide, leaving all these curious and perplexing problems to him to whom they truly belong. We may accept his statements in his Word. We ought indeed to take them on trust from him, and our confidence in him ought to silence within us every misgiving. There is but one way out of a labyrinth, when we have become hopelessly involved, and that is to put our hand in that of a guide, and blindly follow his leading. And there is only one way out of these spiritual perplexities to which I have been referring. That way is to have confidence in Christ, and take all that he says in childlike faith. We who have been living, as we trust, in closest fellowship with him for years, and who have found him to be the inspirer of all that is best and noblest in us, know no more about the solution of these mysteries than you do now, or than we did ourselves at first. But we know *him* better, and our fuller knowledge of him has led to greater mental composure in regard to them, because we are persuaded that what he says is true. Like Martha we may not be able to comprehend the "how" of everything that he has affirmed, but we are prepared to receive anything from him, and when men taunt us with believing what we do not understand, we make reply, "Oh, yes, but we have a good reason for our belief, for He who died for us has said it is so, and we know that he is true." Try this plan, dear friends. Leave off your questionings about these matters that are too high for you, these things which God has kept in his own power. They are of no practical importance to you; follow

Christ, and very soon to you also will come that "repose" of spirit which lies upon the "height" of faith.

III. Finally, let me apply the principle of my text for a moment or two to the contingencies of the future. We are all prone to pry into the years that are to come, and many are the misplaced anxieties we cherish regarding them. Sometimes we are solicitous about ourselves. We cannot see what is to become of us, amid the crosses and losses that have come upon us. And if we have no such cause for apprehension, we torment ourselves about others. What shall our children do? Will they give themselves earnestly to the Saviour, or will they let the influence of fashion and sin seduce them to their destruction? Or, again, it is our friends for whom we are concerned. We wish to know how they will stand, whether they will be faithful and true to the last, or will falter and give way before temptation. Or, we fear for the Church. Like the aged Eli, "our hearts tremble for the ark of God." We ask ourselves, Can it be possible that error and unbelief, ungodliness and impurity shall take captive "the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood"? Or, to mention no more, we are distressed for the future of the nation. We look around and see selfishness and corruption dwelling in the places which patriotism and purity were wont to occupy, and as one system of fraud after another is detected and exposed, we cry, "What are we coming to? What shall be the end of these things?" Now to all these misgivings about the future, whether of ourselves or others, whether of the Church or of the State, we have but one answer, and that is furnished by the principle of my text. The future is not ours. The present is. We are responsible for the present and not for the future, except only as it shall

be affected by the present. Nay, we shall best serve the future, and secure it from those evils which we fear, by doing with our might the work of the present, and leaving the issue with our God. To all those among us, therefore, who are weighting themselves down by anxious questionings about the future, I would say, Leave that alone. It belongs to God. The passing moment only is yours, and the duty of that moment is to "follow Christ." Let that duty have your whole attention. In your business "follow Christ," by conducting it for his glory and on his maxims, and leave the result with him. He will take care of you. In your household "follow Christ," by dwelling with the members of your family in love and purity, and setting before them an example of faith and charity. Then trust the rest with him. He will "turn his hand upon the little ones," and take them under his protection. In the church let your endeavor be to adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour by a holy walk and conversation, and do not distress yourself about things that have not yet occurred, and that will not occur if only all its members be faithful and upright. The Philistines will not carry off God's ark, or if they do, they will soon be made as eager to send it back as they were to take it away, and the event will be overruled for the smashing and mutilation of their own Dagon. Be sure God will take means to preserve his Church. Your individual duty is to follow Christ in every matter that comes before you, and let no carking care for what is merely problematical unfit you for going whole-heartedly into that which is clearly the work of the hour. So with national affairs: What may be the complexion of things a hundred years hence; whether the second centenary of the republic shall be as full of jubilee as the first; whether

our political corruptions shall then have gone to that place to which slavery has already been sent before them, or whether they still shall sit as a nightmare on the land—that is not for us to fret over. Our present duty is to do the work of Christ in the nation by insisting on the cardinal virtues of honesty, sobriety, justice, and benevolence. Let us do that work right earnestly; the rest is God's.

THE EAGLE'S NEST.

DEUTERONOMY xxxii. 11, 12.—"**As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.**"

THAT was a day never to be forgotten by any who were privileged to be present at its solemn services, when Moses said "Farewell" to the tribes whom for forty years he had led through the wilderness. The time drew near when "the man of God" must die; yet no mere "debt of nature" was his departure, for "his eye was not dimmed, neither was his natural force abated;" but because "he spake unadvisedly with his lips," and "believed not God to sanctify him" at Meribah, "in the eyes of the children of Israel," he must not enter the Promised Land. This was a bitter disappointment, and we can deeply sympathize with him as he cries, "O Lord God, thou hast begun to show thy servant thy greatness and thy mighty hand. I pray thee let me go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon;" but when the answer came, "Let it suffice thee, speak no more unto me of this matter," he calmly submitted and began "to set his house in order" for his death. Without one murmuring or rebellious word, he rehearsed in the ears of all the people the history in which he had taken such an honorable part, and the laws which he had received for them from God; and then, having given Joshua charge concerning them in Jehovah's name, he sang this psalm,

which for poetic sublimity, for holy expostulation, for devout piety, and for solemn power has never been surpassed. He praises Jehovah with the fervor of a seraph, and pleads with the people with the tenderness of a father. Now the strains are soft and low, as if they came from the chords of an Æolian harp in the stillness of the gentle summer eve; anon they are loud and stormful, as if some gust of passionate intensity had come sweeping over his spirit; now they are joyous with the recollection of Jehovah's mercies; and again they are terrible, as with the echoes of Sinai's thunder, when he rolls out the fearful doom that must attend the after-apostasy of the chosen people.

It is all unique. Yet to the modern reader there is perhaps no strain in it so sweet as that which I have just read as my text. The figure which is here introduced is one which seems to have been a favorite with Moses, for in a former portion of the history we have these words (Exodus xix. 4): "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings." The probability therefore is, that in his shepherd life among the mountains of Midian he had often seen and been impressed by the interesting process which he here describes, and so the allusion to the eagle and her young would be just as natural and appropriate for him, as the kindred illustration taken from the hen gathering her brood under her wings was for the Lord Jesus. But, however we may account for his selection of it, the figure itself is as true to nature as it is striking and instructive in the use which is here made of it. The eagle has a peculiar affection for its young, and is said to manifest it in a most unusual manner. When she thinks them strong enough for flight she disturbs their nest, with the view of making it so uncomfortable for them that they must

leave it; then she flutters over them to encourage them to attempt to fly and to show them how to do it; and if every other method fails, it is alleged that she spreads her wings, and taking her offspring on them, soars with them aloft; then gliding swiftly from beneath them, she leaves them for the moment to their own resources. But if they should be unable to bear themselves up, she darts beneath them again with incredible swiftness, and receiving them once more upon her wings she prevents their fall, and brings them back again to the rocky ledge whereon the nest was built. Thus it was, according to the poet, that Jehovah educated his ancient people, and since his dealings with them were typical and parabolical representations of his treatment of individual men in spiritual matters, under the gospel dispensation, it is no mere fanciful accommodation of my text, but indeed a fair and legitimate interpretation of it, which finds in it a description of the calling and training of human souls for the glorious and exalted "inheritance of the saints in light." Thus at least we design to regard it now. We find in it these three things as so many separate ingredients in the soul's discipline for heaven—needful dislodgement, perfect example, and efficient help. Let us seek briefly to illustrate each.

I. There is needful dislodgement. The eagle "stirreth up her nest," making it disagreeable to her young; so the Lord does with those whom he calls to himself. When the sons of Jacob found themselves in Egypt, the brothers of the king's favorite minister, with the goodly land of Goshen reserved for them and for their cattle, they might well have said within themselves, "The lines have fallen unto us in pleasant places." They were in a very delightful nest; and so long as

their enjoyment of Egypt's best things lasted, they would naturally have no desire to leave the land in which they were so comfortably provided for. But this was not God's purpose regarding them. He wished to plant them in the country which he had promised to their fathers, and so to awaken in them the desire for its blessedness he "stirred up their nest." Another king arose who knew not Joseph. He "made their lives bitter with hard service," and reduced them to the most degrading slavery. Then their cry ascended into the ear of Jehovah, whom they had, alas! too much forgotten. Out of their agony came their prayer, and in answer to their prayer, came Moses.

Now is it not very much in the same way yet that God works in the conversion of souls? In the day of our worldly comfort and business affluence, while we dwell in the Goshen of prosperity, we think little of God; we care little for the concerns of our souls; we are not in the very least attracted to the heavenly land. But when a reverse comes upon us, when poverty or sickness or bereavement or affliction of any sort attacks us, then we are compelled to confront the great soul problem, "What must I do to be saved?" and as that anxious cry is crushed out of our heart, we find the Lord near us with his deliverance. There was once a king in Judah who, in the splendor of his prosperity, exalted himself above the God of his fathers; he set up gods many and lords many; he persecuted the prophets of Jehovah; he made his own children to pass through the fire unto Moloch, and filled Jerusalem with blood from the one end of the city even unto the other; and he thought not, all that while, of Him with whom especially he had to do. But see how God "stirred up the nest" for him. A few years rolled on, the Babylonian enemy came sweeping

like a destroying tide over his dominions, and in the reflux of the wave he was borne back a captive to the conqueror's home. There, amid his loneliness, he was brought face to face with his conscience and his God, and out of the agony of conviction which that produced there was born his prayer of penitence, in answer to which he found regeneration and forgiveness, so that he went back to his country and his throne a new man, and spent the latter part of his life in seeking to undo what he had done in the former.

Now as the Lord dealt with Manasseh, he deals with many yet. He troubles them, that they may be brought to see their true condition, and to feel their need of him. He mars their enjoyment of earthly things, that he may whet their souls' appetite for those enduring joys which the world cannot take away. See then that you do not misunderstand his discipline of *you*. When he makes you miserable by the loss of external prosperity, it is that he may lead you to the true source of happiness in himself; when he deprives you of the riches that are perishable, it is that he may impel you to seek those which are incorruptible and eternal; when he wounds your heart, it is that he may ultimately heal it; when death breaks in upon your homestead and bears away one of the cherished objects of your affection, it is that you may be stirred up to seek your solace in Him who is "the Resurrection and the Life." This is the general principle of God's providential dealings with men, for thus by the prophet he is represented as speaking, "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early." He awakens, that he may convert. He passes by in the whirlwind and the

earthquake and the fire, that he may the better prepare the heart to hear the "still small voice" of gospel grace. He "stirreth up the nest," that we may be compelled to face the stern realities of eternity, and begin to live indeed.

It is no true blessing, therefore, for a man to have unbroken prosperity. It fosters a false security; it generates pride; it is apt to make the individual feel that he is independent even of God. He is prone to say, "To-morrow shall be as this day," and so to take no thought of any sort for the future and the unseen. Hence the Psalmist has said, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." He is the really unfortunate man, therefore, who has never known adversity; and he is to be truly congratulated who by reason of his afflictions has found out the glorious truth that life—real, solid, serious, and immortal life—begins and consists in the knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Perhaps there may be in this audience some one who is even at the present moment passing through this disturbing and dislodging process. God is "stirring up his nest." The things which used to delight him have now no attraction for him; the wealth he prized has passed from his grasp; the business on which he was wont to pride himself has fallen into decay; or the house which was once so joyous with the ring of the laughter of happy children is desolate and his heart depressed. Let such an one learn that all this is but the way God takes to sweep the house, in order that he may find the lost jewel of his priceless soul. All this is but the setting of him out to face for himself those dreadful questions which can find their only satisfactory solution in his conversion.

But it is in this way also that God trains a soul after it has come to him; and though that is a subordinate thought quite distinct from the principal idea of my text, I may dwell on it for a moment or two.

Read the book of Judges, and you will find that ever as the chosen people began to grow self-sufficient and to forget God, some new oppressor came upon them. Now it was Eglon, now Sisera, now Midian, now Ammon, and now Philistia; and under the weight of their affliction they returned in penitence to Jehovah's feet. But is not the life of the individual Christian to-day very like the history of the nation of Israel as it appears in that old record? When he forgets God, and, feeling himself as comfortable as a bird in a nest, leaves off all care for the concerns of his soul, and loses his interest in the ordinances of the gospel; then, by some providential dispensation, in the shape of disappointment or sorrow or affliction, God stirs him out of his resting-place, and compels him to return to himself. Have we not here the explanation of many of the unsettlements and discomforts through which we have passed in our lives? I have heard one tell that in the first fresh fervor of his spiritual life he consecrated himself to the ministry of the gospel, and went to college to prepare himself to discharge the duties of that office. But after he had been studying some years his heart grew cold, and he was drawn into commerce. He had not ceased to be a Christian, but he had lost that first love that impelled him to give himself to the ministry. Yet the Lord had not forgotten his vow, for he did not allow him to prosper. One plan after another was frustrated, and at length, disciplined by these trials, he was brought again to the Saviour's feet, went and finished his preparatory

course, and entered the ministry, in which he was made a blessing to many souls. Now as it was with this friend, and his consecration of himself to a life in the Christian ministry, so it has been with many, and their consecration of themselves to the ministry of the Christian life. At the hour of conversion they dedicated themselves to God in Christ, but after a while they became comparatively indifferent. Yet the Lord did not let them alone: he stirred up the nest, that he might revive their piety; he sent affliction, that he might stimulate them to renewed zeal in the cultivation of their souls for heaven. Which of us who has arrived at middle life has not had a whole series of such nest-stirring experiences in his personal history? And as to-day we look back upon them we can see that after each we took a new start, beginning each time on a higher level, so that we might almost say, that if we had known no such discipline we should never have had any growth in the Christian life. Thus it is that we explain the words of the apostle, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." He trains us by our trials. He guides us by our afflictions. He quickens us by the disturbances to which in his providence we are subjected. We are often apt to fret indeed over the ceaseless return of discipline. We think it hard that we are never allowed to be long at rest. Ever as we find ourselves in some well-feathered nest we are stirred out of it; and we can never speak of ourselves as settled. But all this is because we are still in danger. Bad as it is to endure these things, it would be still worse for us if they did not come upon us, and when, in the heavenly land, we soar on tireless pinion, doing the high behests of God, we shall feel thankful for the dislodgements that first compelled us to use our faith-wings in his service here.

II. But I find in this figure, in the second place, perfect example. As the eagle fluttereth over her young, so the Lord did with his people. There is a passage in Sir Humphry Davy's *Salmonia* (a book dear to every lover of the angler's craft) which may well illustrate this portion of my text. He says: "I once saw a very fine and interesting sight above one of the crags of Ben Weevis, near Strathgarve. Two parent eagles were teaching their offspring—two young birds—the manœuvres of flight. They began by rising from the top of a mountain in the eye of the sun (it was about mid-day, and bright for this climate). They at first made small circles, and the young birds imitated them: they paused on their wings waiting till they had made their first flight, and then they took a second and larger gyration, always rising toward the sun and enlarging their circle of flight, so as to make a gradually ascending spiral. The young ones still slowly followed, apparently flying better as they mounted, and they continued this sublime kind of exercise, always rising, till they became mere points in the air, and the young ones were lost, and afterwards their parents, to my aching sight." * Now, could anything be finer than that as an illustration of the method by which, through the example which he sets before us, God teaches us to live? He is not content with laying down the law for us, but in his own dealings with us he shows us the law glorified and brightened by his actions. Does he command us to be merciful? He is himself "rich in mercy to all that call upon him." Does he enjoin us to be benevolent? He has himself "loaded us with his benefits." Does he require us to forgive? He has himself "multiplied to pardon."

* Davy's *Salmonia*, pp. 99–100.

But that we may not miss the force of his example because it is that of a Divine Being, he has, if I may so say, incarnated it in the life and character of Jesus Christ our Lord; and the more we study that, the more shall we be impressed with the graphic appropriateness of the figure of my text. That is perfect, and so it keeps perpetually fluttering over us, and soaring above us like the mother-bird over the eaglet. No matter what attainments we may make, we shall still see something in Christ which we as yet have not been able to realize. We shall never lose that ideal by overtaking it. Still will it hover over us, drawing us on and up toward the measure of the stature of the perfect man in Christ Jesus. Moreover, the example of Christ, beginning in the lowest form, widens into such ample circles as to embrace within its sweep all the circumstances and relationships of life. Herein it answers to those ever-enlarging gyrations of the parent eagles, which, in the passage I have just quoted, Sir Humphry Davy has so admirably described. At first we have "the holy child," subject to his parents in the home at Nazareth, and furnishing a lesson for the nursery in every Christian household; then we have the frank and ingenuous boy, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them and asking them questions, presenting a picture which ought to be framed and fixed in the heart of every schoolboy; then we have the industrious artisan, working at the carpenter's bench and consecrating all earthly toil by his divine condescension, a scene which might well become an inspiration to all who labor in the workshops of the land; then we have the pious man in the synagogue, and the good man going his rounds of benevolence, and the teacher with his disciples, and the friend with his friends; and so it rises up, widen-

ing as it rises, until as its loftiest manifestation we have the sublime self-sacrifice of the cross, and that is so exalted as to be wellnigh out of sight of this selfish small-eyed generation.

Thus viewed we shall find that the divine example of the Lord Jesus has a bearing upon us all, no matter what may be our age, our circumstances, or our attainments. He was "in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin;" hence, wherever we are, save only when we are walking in the ways of iniquity, we may see the print somewhere of the Master's foot. In the wilderness of temptation; in the solitude of the closet; in the home of sorrow brightened with sympathy; in the garden of agony; and in the hall of judgment, where evil men pour insults on our name, he has gone before us, teaching us in each case how to bear ourselves. Yea, he has descended for us into the darkness of death, that he might show us how to die, as well as take for us the sting from death. Oh, let us seek to imbibe the spirit of this divine Redeemer, that we may in our measure reproduce his life before the eyes of our fellow-men!

Look at that youth with his brush and palette in his hands standing before the master-piece of the great Italian. He is studying every minutest feature of the superb original, and at length he becomes possessed, as it were, by the spell of the genius that is looking down upon him from the silent canvas. Then he sets to work for himself, and though his earliest efforts are about as awkward as the first timid flutterings of the eaglet, yet he tries again and again, lessening each time the interval between him and his model, until at length he stands out before the world recognized as one who has caught the fervor and the inspiration of his master. So let it be with us, and the perfect pat-

tern which the great Redeemer has left us. We are working on no silent canvas, and with no oily colors. It is ours to paint on the rude ground of our common life with thoughts and words and deeds. But there is a grander inspiration in that than the arti his studio; while in the "Follow me," that us from the lips of the Lord, there is a noble agement than earthly genius can impart.

But you may be ready to say, as you cont the spotlessness of the great Exemplar, "It is t for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it;" a just here that the third thing in my text comes appropriately in.

III. It is effectual help. "The eagle spreac abroad her wings, taketh her young, beareth them her wings." So God doth with his people, especia when they are engaged in following the example whi the Lord Christ hath left them. Mr. Philip Hen Gosse, the well-known naturalist, in his interestin work on the birds of Jamaica, speaking of the red-tailed buzzard, which is closely allied to the eagles, tells us that a friend of his, who was not likely ever to have heard of the verses before us, "once witnessed the emergence of two young ones from a nest near the top of an immense cotton-tree, and their first attempt at flight. He distinctly saw the mother-bird, after the first young one had flown a little way and was beginning to flutter downward, fly beneath it, and present her back and wings for its support. He could not say, indeed, that the young one actually rested on, or even touched the parent; perhaps its confidence returned on seeing support so near, so that it managed to reach a high tree, when the other little one, invited by its parent, tried its infant wings in like

manner." * This at any rate is plain: the parent bird is ever near the struggling eaglet, and is ready in a moment with effectual aid, and so God has said to each of his children, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." "My grace is sufficient for thee." "My strength is made perfect in weakness." "Fear thee not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will help thee, yea, I will strengthen thee; yea, I will sustain thee with the right hand of my righteousness." "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." These are all the promises of Him who is the Faithful and the True. We may rely therefore on their fulfilment. And this ought to sustain us in the arduous endeavors which we make to attain Christian excellence. But, that we may not mistake in this matter, let us learn a few things concerning it, which seem to be suggested by the figure here employed.

1. In the first place, it is not intended to supersede our own exertions. The whole purpose of the mother-bird is to get its offspring to make right use of its wings; and the grand design of God's assistance is to direct and stimulate us to use our own powers in his service and for his glory. The help is his, but the outcome of that help is in our own character and actions. Hence we explain the mutual relation to each other of the two clauses of the apostle's command, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." And it is remarkable that in all the deliverances wrought out for his ancient people by Jehovah, this purpose of stimulating them to personal exertion is apparent. He parted the waters of the Red

* See Fairbairn's Imperial Bible Dictionary, article Eagle.

Sea for them, but then they had themselves to walk to the further shore. He furnished the manna, but each had to gather his own portion. He provided the water, but each had to fill his pitcher for himself. He caused the brazen serpent to be set up, but each bitten one had to look for his own cure. He gave the victory over Amalek in answer to the prayer of Moses, but that victory was also the result of the valor of the soldiers under Joshua's leadership. So in the miracles of Christ you will see very frequently the same purpose to stimulate to personal effort. The man with the withered hand was commanded to stretch it out. The poor helpless paralytic was enjoined to "arise, take up his bed and walk," and the impotent one at the pool of Bethesda was exhorted "to rise up and walk."

Now it is not otherwise in spiritual things. The command given to the anxious one is "Believe," "Repent," and the injunction to the disciple is "Follow me." But while there is divine help given for obeying these precepts, yet it must never be forgotten that the actual obeying of them must be our own act. The believing, the repenting, the following, are not done for us, they are to be done by us. We have already the capacity for doing them all, and the strength to use that capacity will be imparted to us as we make the attempt to use it. The bird learns to fly by using its wings. The child learns to walk by employing its limbs, and we learn to live the Christian life by employing our faith and cultivating obedience to the commands of Christ. I know that the parallel is not perfectly exact, for there is a kind of help imparted to the soul in the making of these efforts which the parent cannot give to the child and the eagle cannot give to its young; nevertheless, let us not forget that even that mysterious assistance can be enjoyed by us only

while we are in the act of putting forth our own exertions. A man is not carried helplessly into the new life any more than the Israelites were carried over the Red Sea. He lives when he chooses to believe, and that believing, however much divine agency may be concerned with it, is his own act. Wait not therefore for any one to spread for you the faith-wing on which you are to rise, but make the effort to expand it for yourself, and you will find beside you the guiding and sustaining Saviour.

2. But let it be noted again that this divine assistance is always near. The parent eagle kept ever hovering near its young one, and in its moment of extremity darted in beneath it with speedy assistance. So God is ever nigh to them that need him. There is indeed no one so near to us as Jehovah is. I cannot cross the street to ask a neighbor's help without taking some little time to do it in; but I can reach God in a moment. I cannot speak to the friend who is by my side without taking some time in which to tell him of my strait; but a look, a cry, a telegram-like appeal will enter in a moment into the heart of God, and quick as sensation travels from the finger-tip to the brain along the wondrous mechanism of the nervous system, the promised aid may be by me enjoyed.

God though unseen is not distant. The veil that hides him from us is one of nature, not of space. And within his call are the angelic ministers who are eager all to do his behests of mercy. Ah! if for but one moment our eyes might be opened as those of Elisha's servant were at Dotham, we too might see hovering all around us the blessed messengers whom he has told off for our assistance. For the miracle in that case was not in the presence of the angelic host, but only in the purging of the young man's eyes to per-

ceive them. But, better than all his angels, God himself is with us, nearer us than is the friend who is sitting by our side, nay, dwelling in us by his Spirit; therefore we may sing, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

3. But to add only one thought more: this divine help is all-sufficient. It meets our every need. The eaglet cannot fall while the mother-bird is near; the Christian cannot fail when God is nigh. How often, with all our willingness to help a brother, we are painfully conscious of our inability to succor him. We stand as it were outside of him. We can soothe his fevered brow, or chafe his wearied limbs, or bathe his aching head, but we cannot get into his soul. We cannot put heart into him. We cannot inspire him with faith, or hope, or courage, or fill his spirit with patience. However much we may desire to do any of these things, they are beyond our power. We cannot make him brave before the tempter, or give him firmness to say "No" to the enticing sinner. But God can, for he can reach the spirit. He has often done these very things for us. We know whereof we speak, and what he has done for us he can do, O timid, struggling one! for you. Go then to him. Wait upon him; for they that wait on him shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

There are two practical thoughts which I should like to leave with you as the application of this discourse:

1. Let us see in this subject the key to the right understanding of God's providential discipline of his people. We are apt to misjudge and misconstrue his dealings with us, and when we are called by him to face trial, we are prone to imagine that he is angry with us, or that he has a controversy with us. The truth rather is that he is using means to stir us up to

earnest personal exertion in our endeavors after the Christian life. It seems a paradox to say that affliction is an indication that God loves us, and when we repeat the apostle's words in the hearing of some troubled one, they seem to fall like an acid on a raw, unbandaged wound. Yet they are most true, since trials keep us from becoming "settled on our lees like Moab;" they empty us out from vessel to vessel, clarifying us ever by the process; or, in the figure of my text, they stir the nest and push us over, that we may be urged to use our faith-wings, and soar aloft in the service of our God.

2. Let us learn from this subject how we should proceed wisely and tenderly to train others for God. We should be to those whom we desire to benefit as near as possible what God has been to us. Parents, here is a lesson for you. It bids you seek the godly upbringing of your children by love and example and constant watchful care. Sabbath-school teacher, here is a lesson too for you. It bids you labor for the conversion and spiritual growth of those committed to your care, with continuous assiduity, unwearied love, and consistent life. Pastor, here is a lesson too for you. It bids you be among your people as Paul was among the Thessalonians, gentle as a nurse cherishing her children. Yea, to all who would be useful in training souls for heaven there is here an admonition to remember the omnipotence of love, when that is conjoined with the beauty of holiness. Let us try to put it in practice, and so each be in his measure like him whom the poet thus describes:

> "And as the bird each fond endearment tries
> To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
> He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,
> Allur'd to brighter worlds, and led the way."

OUR FATHER.

MATTHEW vi. 9.—"Our Father."

ROMANS viii. 15.—"Ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."

WHAT sacred associations cluster round the word father! The very mention of it carries us back to the dawning of our consciousness, when we learned our earliest lessons at a parent's lips. We think of the time when he trained us to fold our hands in prayer, and when, with the holy book before us, we stood between his knees to read the touching story of the cross. As we grew in years, we increased also in confidence in him. He was our oracle in doubt, our protector in danger, our adviser in perplexity. To him we went first to tell our joys, and by his side we stood to sob out our sorrows. The thought of him was inwoven into all our youthful plans and early ambitions. Our highest happiness was in pleasing him, and our bitterest grief was in wounding his affection. We knew no worldly care when we dwelt beneath his sheltering roof, we felt no fear when we held his loving hand. While he lived we had the consciousness that there was one between us and all the rude and rough assaults of the world, and when he died we first experienced the dreariness of solitude and isolation. A true father is the best earthly friend while he lives, and after he has gone there gathers round his memory a halo of glory borrowed from the heaven into which he has entered, and we name him with a feeling that is almost

worship. All that is tender and true and strong and wise and generous and noble is to a loving son treasured up in this word Father.

But to the thoughtful and religious soul the earthly significance does not exhaust the meaning of this holy name; for God at first designed that the human fatherhood should be the miniature of that relationship in which he stood to men, and he wished them to understand that the love of parents to their children on earth "is but as a drop to the ocean of fatherly love which is in himself." * Adam was the son of God, not only as being the creature of his hand, but also as possessing a moral and spiritual resemblance to him, and as being the object of his complacency and affection. So long as he remained in innocence there was the outflow of fatherly love and regard from God to him, and there was in him filial affection and reverence toward God. But when he sinned, he lost that spiritual resemblance to Jehovah which was the glory and crown of his sonship; and God, as the moral governor of the universe, could not but visit him with the penalty of his transgression. Hence he was deprived of the privileges of his sonship. Still, however, the fatherly heart of God yearned over his lost child, and sought his deliverance and return. But that could not be attained without satisfaction being made to the law which man had broken; so, to remove that obstacle, God sent his own divine and eternal Son into the world to take human nature into union with his own, and to offer himself a sacrifice for human sin. This mission was successfully accomplished, and now, the honor of his government having been vindicated, and the demands of his justice having been

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* Leighton on the Lord's Prayer.

met, God is both able and willing to receive back into the embrace of his Fatherhood all who are willing by faith in Jesus to return to him. As sinners, we are the "children of wrath;" as believers in Jesus, we become anew "the sons of God." Thus it is not only as the first-born of every creature, and the great elder brother of humanity, but also and more especially as the divine Redeemer and Regenerator of his people, that Jesus takes them by the hand, and leading them into the holy of holies, and up to the very mercy-seat, teaches them to say, "Our Father."

There is, indeed, a looser and lower sense in which the term Father is used in regard to God's relationship to men. He is so styled as the author of their existence, the preserver of their lives, and the provider for their wants. But he is all these to the lower creation as well as men, and so it is only when we take into account the elements of spiritual remembrance and mutual affection that we rise to the true and proper ideal of human sonship on the one hand and divine Fatherhood on the other. This, however, was lost in the Fall, but it is graciously restored to all who believe in Jesus, according to these declarations: "As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." * And again, "Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus." † Now as this faith is the great means in the hand of the Holy Spirit by which men are regenerated, we see how it comes that Paul has said, "We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." Regeneration restores in us that spiritual resemblance to Jehovah which is the essence of sonship, and which was lost at the Fall,

* John i. 12. † Gal. iii. 26.

and thus it is only through the new birth that we can re-enter into God's family.

There are those, indeed, who would reduce the proclamation of the gospel to the simple preaching that men are already, and as they are, God's children, but this seems to me to be both unscriptural and dangerous. Men are God's children indeed, but they are his lost children. The gospel proceeds upon the ideas that we have effaced God's image from us by our sins, and that, with the loss of our character, we have forfeited our position in his family, and it proclaims that we may regain alike this character and position through faith in Jesus Christ; but it nowhere asserts that we have never lost them. It is an offer of restoration, and therefore it implies that something had been forfeited. The sacrifice of Christ, indeed, did not make God our Father, but it made it consistent with the justice of his nature and the rectitude of his government for him to manifest his Fatherhood to sinful men who believe in Jesus. The change is wrought not in him but in us. God is our Father, but we, as sinners, can enter into the possession of the character and privileges of his sons only when we believe in Jesus and are born again. Thus there is "no sonship without spiritual birth." But so soon as one believes in the Lord Jesus, and sees the Father revealed in and through the Son, he becomes a child of God, and as among the earliest utterances of the infant you hear the parent's name, so the first word of the believer is "Abba," and the beginning of his prayer, "Our Father."

Here, therefore, we may fitly pause a moment and examine whether we have this faith? Do we believe in Jesus Christ as our prophet to reveal God unto us, and our priest to make atonement for us? Have we

received as true his testimony concerning God as our Father? Have we been born again? Have we had restored to us by the Holy Spirit the lineaments of the divine image in "knowledge, righteousness, and holiness"? Can we, taught by that Spirit, call God "Our Father"? If we can, how great the privilege to be thus related to the King eternal! how high the honor to be thus connected with the Great Supreme! To have all the treasures of the word father dignified, glorified, infinitized, by having that name identified with Jehovah—oh, there is nothing so exalting, nothing so transporting as that, and they whose portion it is may truly say, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." *

Having thus seen how we enter into this divine sonship, let us briefly pass in review a few of the present practical advantages which we may derive from it.

I. Here I observe, first, as suggested by the place where we find the words "Our Father," that when we can truly and intelligently call God by this name, new life is given to our devotions. It is not without significance that the prayer, so simple in its terms, and so wide in its comprehensiveness, which Jesus gave us both as a model and a form, should begin with these homely words. They bid us pause a moment and definitely realize what God is to us, and in what relationship we stand to him, before we go forward to present our petitions. Truly, as the devout Leighton has said, "this is one great cause of our wandering, that we do not at our entrance into prayer compose ourselves to due thought of God, and to set ourselves

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* 1 John iii. 1.

in his presence: this would do much to ballast our minds, that they tumble not to and fro, as is their custom." Even if we stood in another and less endearing relationship to Jehovah, it would still be becoming in us to seek to bring vividly before us the position which we occupy in reference to him; but when that relationship is Fatherhood on the one side and sonship on the other, then we do both him and ourselves great injustice if we in any wise ignore it. If, for example, we lose consciousness of the Fatherhood and think of Jehovah only as the Just Judge and impartial arbiter of men, how much terror comes into the heart, and how do "fear and trembling get hold upon us." If, again, to the exclusion of all others, we allow the idea to take possession of us that God is a king surrounded with all the glory of a celestial court, and to be approached with the minute observance of some heavenly etiquette, our minds will be so occupied with the manner of our coming to him that we shall be apt to forget the matter for which we come, and our service will be a pompous ritual perhaps, but a vain formality.

I am persuaded that much of our lack of enjoyment in prayer, and much of the lifelessness and artificialness in our devotions generally, must be traced to the fact that we have not thoroughly received the spirit of adoption, and have lost the idea of God's Fatherhood. Why should we be in terror of a father? What liberty is that which our own son enjoys! See how he comes bounding into our room, calculating that we will be thoroughly interested in all he has to say, and knowing that when he lays hold of our heart he has taken hold of our strength! But is it different with God? Let us remember that however ready a father on earth is to hear and help his child in perplexity, Jehovah is

infinitely more so; let us think that whatever love our human parent has lavished upon us, God regards us with infinitely more, and then, even as in the days of our childhood we went with confidence and alacrity to our father's knee, we shall go with delight and enjoyment to God's throne of grace.

Then as regards the celebration of God's praise the same law obtains. What gladness a child has in singing when a father is by! There is no thought of weariness or indifference, but every effort is put forth to give him pleasure. And if this be so in the case of the earthly, how much more ought it to be in the matter of the heavenly? Let us but recognize that God is our Father, and that he is listening to our song, then our hymns of praise will be no longer dull and lifeless things, but will become animated and earnest; the words we use will be no more doggerel lines, but the living poetry of warm and loving hearts; the music we sing will be no more cold and chilling, but heart-stirring and ennobling in its strains, and we will rival David, when he cried, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise. Awake up, my glory; awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early." * Here is the true cure for dull devotion, powerless prayer, and uninteresting worship. We need no splendid liturgy, no solemn litany, no gorgeous ritual. We need only a fresh baptism of the Spirit of adoption. We need only the hearts of sons glowing with ardent love for our divine Father. We need only to be able to say, in all their length and breadth and depth and height of meaning, these words, "Our Father," and then filial confidence filling our souls, "hosannas" will not "languish on

* Psalm lvii. 7, 8.

our tongues," nor prayer come faltering feebly from our lips. It is an easy thing to offer the entire Lord's Prayer when we have mastered the first two words; and the closet will be a chosen retreat when it becomes associated in our minds with our most endearing fellowship with our divine Father.

II. But passing from this aspect of the subject, I ask you to observe that when we can truly and intelligently call God our Father, new joy is given to the discharge of duty. Duty, considered simply as such, is a cold, stern thing, and needs love to inspire it before it can become joy. Duty thinks mainly of the work to be done; love thinks of the person for whom it is performed. Duty's motive is fear, and its great concern is lest the work should not be well done, or lest some part of it should be omitted; love's motive is simply and only to give expression to itself in appropriate actions. The fear which actuates duty often operates to produce the very evils which it most deprecates; but the ardor which burns in love gives a joyful energy to the heart, so that everything is done by it "with a will." Duty can be satisfied with itself, and says often with complacency, "Now my work is done." Love is never content, but is always finding new ways of manifesting its unselfish devotion.

You know the difference, when you are lying on a sick-bed, between a strange nurse and an affectionate wife or a loving daughter. Yet when I put this contrast, let me say, in a parenthesis, that I would not be understood as depreciating a class of persons whom, from domestic experience, I have learned to "esteem very highly in love for their work's sake." Their skill, patience, and tenderness can hardly be over-estimated, and when pestilence has entered the home

their presence is felt to be an unspeakable relief. But, indeed, wherever this is true, their motive is not mere duty, but love to Christ, and to his people for Christ's sake, and to them, true sisters of mercy as they are, albeit they have taken no vow and wear no livery, Jesus will say at last, "I was sick, and ye nursed me: inasmuch as ye did it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me." Let me put, then, the case of a nurse in whom there is no love to Christ, or to the individual on whom she attends, but who has only a desire to do her duty, and let me ask you to contrast that with the attention of a wife or daughter. Whatever you request the nurse does; whatever the medical man orders she feels bound to obey; she gives her ears, her eyes, her feet, her hands, yea even her intelligence to you; but what a difference is there between that, valuable as it is, and a wife's affection or a daughter's care? They give all that she gives, and their hearts along with it, thereby adding incalculably to the value of the rest. There is something which it is difficult to name or even to describe, but which is felt at once, as distinguishing the one from the other. You cannot say that the servant has not done her duty, but the loving ones have done, oh, how much more! And this feeling in you corresponds to the difference in them; for the one is at her work as work; the others are doing a great work too, but their hearts are so in it that the thought of labor is lost, and their chief concern is to promote your recovery.

Now it is precisely the same in the matter of the service which we render to God, and until, realizing that he is our Father in Jesus Christ, our hearts glow with affection toward him, every attempt which we make to do his will must be simply and only an effort

to do duty. It will be work, and we will be cold and stern in the doing of it. There will be no spring or elasticity of soul about us while we are engaged in it. But when, through faith in Jesus Christ, we get to know and love God as our Father; when, as Paul phrases it, the spirit of adoption is received by us, then all this is changed. Duty is transfigured into delight. What we ought to do becomes identical with what we wish to do, and so the work is a thousand times better done, and we are a thousand times happier in the doing of it. Here, then, is the true talisman at once for human excellence and human happiness, the living for God as our Father in Christ Jesus.

> "A servant with this clause
> Makes drudgery divine,"

and love exorcises from labor all that unwillingness which, whenever it exists, makes the worker for the time a slave. Whenever, therefore, we feel our service becoming irksome, or our lives degenerating into the discharge of routine duties, which we seek with much conscientiousness, it may be, but yet with little joy to perform, we may be sure we are forgetting our adoption. Heaven's own sunshine would illuminate our pathway, if every morning we went forth to do our Father's business; and the driest and most uninteresting things of daily life would acquire a new importance in our eyes, and would be done by us with gladsomeness, if we but felt we were doing them for a Father. Let us try this heavenly specific and we shall soon find that the glory of love will halo for us all common things with its own celestial radiance, and duty will merge into delight.

III. Looking now to another department of human

experience, I remark, thirdly, that when we can truly and intelligently call God Father, a new significance is given to our earthly trials. The Lord himself hath said by the mouth of Solomon, "He that spareth the rod hateth the child," and he is too wise a Father to think of training his children without discipline. By trials he keeps them from falling away; he leads them to bethink themselves and return when they have been backsliding, and he prepares them for the discharge of arduous and important duties. When, however, they are passing through this ordeal, they are apt to be cast down and to imagine that God has forgotten or forsaken them. But this view, though natural in their circumstances, is utterly unwarranted, for it is just because he regards them as his children that he so deals with them. Discipline is a privilege that the Father reserves for his own children. You do not set yourselves to correct the faults of all the young people in the neighborhood. You keep your efforts in that direction for your own, and only because of your affectionate interest in them do you visit them with chastisement. Even so it is with God, and when we are suffering from his hands, instead of thinking that he has forgotten us, we ought to see in the fact a new evidence of his continued regard for us. Even as the sacred writer has said, "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." * Thus viewed, therefore, all our trials are tokens of our Father's affection.

But this is not all; we must have respect to the paternal design with which he sends our afflictions, as

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* Hebrews xii. 7, 8.

well as to the fact that they come from his fatherly heart. They are inflicted upon us, as the apostle in the passage already referred to has declared, in order that the peaceable fruits of righteousness may be wrought out in us. I have read that when the bread-fruit tree is withering, the Samoans plant an aloe beside its root, and thereby it is marvellously revived, becoming as productive as before. So when the tree of holiness within us begins to droop, the great Husbandman plants an aloe beside it in the shape of some trial or affliction, and anew the peaceable fruits present themselves to view. Our chastisements come not for his pleasure, for he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men, but for our profit, that we may be made partakers of his holiness. Now this end is worth all the suffering that needs to be endured in order to secure it. Some time ago, while sojourning in the Housatonic valley, I was greatly interested in passing through a paper manufactory and observing how the filthy rags were put through process after process, until at length the pulp pressed between heavy rollers came out upon the other side a seamless web of fairest white, having the mark of the maker woven into it. Let this illustrate God's purpose with his children. When he subjects them to one species of trial after another, it is only that at the last they may come forth purified and refined, having enstamped upon them his name and character, to be "known and read of all men."

IV. I add only one other thought, namely, that when we can truly and intelligently call God our Father, a new glory is given to our conception of the heavenly world. Jesus teaches us to say, "Our Father which art in heaven," and so leads us to look upon that land

as our home. Many think of heaven only as a place of material splendor. They take literally all the brilliant imagery of the book of Revelation. When they think of the Celestial City, their minds dwell upon its golden streets and pearly gates, but they have no relish for its spiritual delights. So soon, however, as we learn to look upon God as our Father, the glory of heaven to us consists in the presence there of Jehovah, and of the great elder brother, Jesus. The attractions of home, even upon the earth, are to persons, not to places or possessions. If one would know how true that is, let him, after twenty years' absence, return to the place of his birth, and he will find that the abode where once he knew the highest happiness has become to him a solitude from which he will seek to hasten away, or if he linger anywhere it will be in the corner of the churchyard where the ashes of his parents lie. We are attached to persons, not to places. Our living souls can truly love only living persons. We may like external objects or inanimate things, we can love only living, loving beings, and as it is not our likings but our loves that determine our lives, we see how important it is to have a right conception of the persons that constitute the glory and the charm of heaven. We can have no real and absorbing attraction to heaven until we love the persons who are there, and we never can love them until we can call God our Father and Christ our brother.

This helps us to understand how, when the Lord desired to lift the thoughts of his followers to the glory that was before them, and sought to give them a sure anchorage in the storm of trial that was just about to break upon them, he said: * "In my Father's

* John xiv. 2.

house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Home is the centre of the heart, and so, by enabling us to call God our Father and heaven our home, Jesus centres our hearts there, and gives us such an idea of its blessedness that we scarcely think of the outward accessories of its splendor, because of the delightful anticipation that we cherish of being there "at home with the Lord." O that God, through faith in Jesus Christ, would give to each of us this noble conception of heaven! Then, on true and rational principles we shall desire the better country, and at length have fulfilled to us the beautiful German beatitude, "Blessed are the home-sick, for they shall reach home."

> "I met a fairy child, whose golden hair
> Around her face in sunny clusters hung,
> And as she wove her king-cup chain she sung
> Her household melodies; those strains that bear
> The hearer back to Eden. Surely ne'er
> A brighter vision blessed my dreams. 'Whose child
> Art thou,' I said, 'sweet girl?' In accents mild
> She answered, 'Mother's.' When I questioned where
> Her dwelling was, again she answered, 'Home.'
> 'Mother and Home,' O blessed ignorance,
> Or rather blessed knowledge! What advance
> Farther than this shall all the years to come
> With all their lore effect? There are but given
> Two names of higher note, 'Father and Heaven.'"

I close with two simple stories, leaving them almost to make their own application.

In the early days of the European colonies in this country it frequently happened that the settlers came into collision with the Indians, who spoiled their homes and slew or made off with their children. On one such occasion they killed a husband and his eldest son, carrying off into captivity a little girl, nine years old.

When the mother, who had been absent at the time, returned to her abode, her heart was wellnigh broken, but her sorrow was, if possible, more bitter for the living than for the dead. She sought her lost child everywhere, but all her efforts were in vain. At length ten years after, a British officer, having overcome the Indians in battle, made it a condition of peace that they should bring into his camp on a certain morning all the white people in their possession. The news was eagerly spread abroad, and on the day appointed all who had lost their friends came in the excited expectation of having them restored. Four hundred captives were brought in, and fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers passed along the line, looking earnestly for their own. Our poor heart-stricken mother was there, but she could not find her daughter, grown now into a woman, and beyond her recognition. Wringing her hands, she went in sadness to the officer, saying, "I cannot find my daughter." "Is there nothing," said he, "that she would know you by?" "Nothing," she replied, "unless it be a hymn we used to sing together to a favorite tune." "Sing it then," said he. So advancing to the front she sang the well-known lines,

> "Alone, yet not alone am I,
> Though in this solitude so drear," etc.,

and scarcely had she begun when a young woman came rushing forth and fell weeping on her neck. The mother had found her daughter, and they joyfully went together home.

Far different, however, was it with the lost sister of Wyoming. She had been stolen in early childhood, and her friends could not discover whither she had been conveyed. Sixty years went past, and the brothers who were boys when she was taken had become grey-

haired old men, when they heard of a white woman among the Indians who they thought might prove to be their sister. They went to visit her, and as they talked with her the conviction deepened that it was she indeed. They asked her about their old home, and she could tell how many brothers and sisters had been there. They inquired if she knew her name, and she replied that so long time had gone by that she had quite forgotten it. They asked again if she could know it if they repeated it; she could not tell, it was so long ago. "Was it Frances?" said they. A light of recognition passed over her countenance at the sound and she replied, "Yes, it was Frances." "Then," said they, "you are indeed our sister; will you come home with us?" "O no," she said, "I was a young sapling then, I am now an old tree. I cannot be transplanted. My children are here about me, my home is in this place. I cannot go with you." So sorrowfully they returned without her.

God, through the mission of his Son and the ministrations of his servants, is seeking his lost children. I have sung you now a home song; I have spoken in your ear your old home name, Son of God. I know you recognize it as that which you were intended to bear, though you have wandered far away from your Father's house. Will you come home to him, or are you so rooted in the world that you refuse to return? Make not, I entreat you, your home here among the things of earth. Even if they have asserted some power over you be not longer under their control, but, by the supplicated help of the Holy Spirit, arise and go to your Father, for the welcome which was given to the prodigal will be as nothing to that with which God for Christ's sake will receive you. "This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

THE VISION OF GOD.

EXODUS xxiv. 11.—"They saw God, and did eat and drink."

THESE words belong to one of the most solemn and important chapters in the history of Moses. The tribes were encamped at the base of Sinai. Thrice already had the law-giver been in the mount with God, and, with all the dread accompaniments of thunders and lightnings and tempests, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud, the Decalogue had been proclaimed in the hearing of the hushed and awe-stricken multitude. Over sacrificial offerings the people had entered into formal covenant with Jehovah; for after "Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God hath enjoined unto you." Then, to finish this great sacrament, he went up again to the mount at the invitation of Jehovah, taking with him the official representatives of the tribes, and there they met their Lord, this time with reverence indeed, but without their former shuddering dread; for now the darkness in which the Eternal had shrouded himself has given place to the likeness of "a paved work of sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in its clearness." No emblems of severity are now seen by them. He who had before revealed himself in the cloud with flaming thunderbolts flashing forth through the tempest, has now

covered himself with his robe of light. The storm has passed. The clear azure of the sky is now the footstool of Jehovah, and nothing comes from him to create either terror or dismay in the breasts of the spectators; for "upon the nobles of Israel he laid not his hand." Therefore with calm composure and with grateful hearts they sit down before him to complete the covenant service with a holy feast: "They saw God, and did eat and drink."

The vision of God thus enjoyed could not have been a perception of the divine essence by the bodily eye, for that is an impossibility. Neither could it have been the sight of God's glory face to face, for he has said himself, "Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me, and live." Nor was it even up to the level of that which Moses afterwards enjoyed, and which the Lord himself has thus described: "And it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with mine hand. And thou shalt see my back parts; but my face shall not be seen." We must conclude, therefore, that there was among these elders a vivid mental perception of the immediate presence of Jehovah with them, suggested and increased by some symbolical appearance, the character of which is undescribed, but which they were led by unmistakable indications to associate with him. Whatever it was, it was fringed and framed to their vision by the "infinite azure" of the sky, and the robe of light was unaccompanied with those elements of terror in which at other times it was enveloped. Thus, to borrow the words of a German critic, "When the heads of the people venture to draw near their God, they find his presence no more a source of disturbance and dread, but radiant in all the bright love-

liness of supernal glory; a beautiful sign that the higher religion and state of conformity to law now established shall work onwards to eternal blessedness."*

But now, leaving the primary reference of these words, let us get at the principle that is beneath them, and seek to apply that to ourselves. We have here the conjunction of that which is the highest attainment of faith, namely, the vision of God, with that which is the commonest act of our lives, namely, eating and drinking. For us now, indeed, there are no such visible symbols of Jehovah's presence as those which Israel enjoyed, first in the darkness of tempest, and then here, in the unclouded serenity of the sky; but still he who, believing the personal existence of God, hears his voice in conscience and revelation, and marks the indications of his working, alike in what men call nature, and in providence; above all, he who accepts the Lord Jesus Christ as the incarnation of Deity, traces the wonders of his grace in the work of Redemption, and trusts in the Lord Jesus for his own salvation, may be truly said to see God.

Again, eating and drinking is only one form, and that one of the lowest forms of human enjoyment. Therefore, if the vision of God be compatible with that, it may be, it must be, equally so with every proper mode of employment or enjoyment among men. Indeed it is in the union of this spiritual faith with our ordinary occupations that the highest dignity and purest happiness of which our nature is capable are to be sought. When they who see God, and believe in him, can go about their common pursuits, not only without dread, but also with increased relish, they

* Ewald, English translation, vol. ii., p. 106.

have attained to the loftiest style of human life. When the sight of God does not interfere with our daily delights, but only adds to them a holier joy, and when our ordinary pursuits do not hinder us from seeing God, then we too sit down with these elders at their Sinai sacrament, and it may be said of us, as of them, that "we see God, and do eat and drink."

But this cannot be said of all; and, therefore, that I may the better illustrate the principle which I have now distilled from this history, I will bring before you the three experiences in regard to it, which, to my view, exhaust the possibilities of the case:

I. In the first place, then, let it be noted, that there are some who eat and drink without seeing God. This is true in the very lowest sense in which the words can be employed; for, unhappily, there are multitudes who partake of their ordinary food without any perception of the fact that they are indebted for it to a higher power. They take it as a thing of course, or, if they think upon its existence at all, they trace it entirely to their own skill and energy and perseverance. They have earned it by "the sweat of their faces," or by the exercise of their brains, and if they have anything like gratitude in its enjoyment, that takes the shape of self-congratulation, for they give the honor solely to themselves. If it had come to them by miracle, as the manna fell around the camp of Israel, or as the multitude were fed at the hand of Jesus on the mountain side, they would see some reason in the expression of thankfulness to another as the giver of it; but, because they have wrought for it at the bench or in the field, they feel that it is simply and only their own.

In the same way there are many successful men of

business, who enjoy the blessings of prosperity without seeing that God has had any hand in the bestowment of them. They are, as the phrase is, "self-made." They have been the architects of their own fortunes. They have earned their riches by their superior intelligence, their constant supervision of their affairs, their shrewdness in knowing when to take a risk and when to decline it, and their self-restraint in keeping under everything that might interfere with their ambition. Hence, when they survey their great establishments, and sit in their well-appointed homes, they have feelings akin to those which Nebuchadnezzar expressed when he said, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the house of the kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?"

Similarly, there are those who have risen to places of power and influence, alike in the world and in the Church, who never think of God in their enjoyment of their eminence. It has come to them, so they say, all in the way of cause and effect. They have been able, diligent, and persevering, and, therefore, their prosperity or popularity is nothing more than the natural result of their use of appropriate means. And to mention only one other form of the same disposition: there are men among us whose delight has been to unravel the secrets of the external world, and discover the operations of those forces which play so important a part in the physical universe. Their meat and their drink is to sit at the spectroscope, and by their wondrous analysis to bring out the composition of the sun, and of the various members of the planetary sphere. Their joy is to chain the lightning to their messages, and make it carry their words to the world's ends. They rise into ecstasies over the detection of some new fact which witnesses to the uniform-

ity of law; and they become enthusiastic at the prospect of being able to trace the mystery of the universe a step farther back than their predecessors have gone. But all this while they see nothing of God. All with them is law. No thrill of affection vibrates in their hearts to any personal agent; and their emotions are similar to those which one feels as he looks upon a mighty machine moving on in rhythmic regularity at its unceasing work. I do not need to say that all our men of science are not such as I have now described, but every one acquainted with the recent utterances of some of them will admit that these confirm what I have said.

Now I have grouped all these together because they are all alike practical atheists. They eat and drink, but they do not see God. And their blindness in this regard is to me amazing. For, to begin with the last, and to take the conception which they have of the universe as a machine, how is it possible to entertain such a notion for a moment, without taking along with it that of a mechanician, to whom it owed its construction, and who is superintending its operations? And what is law, if there be not personality behind it? Even in the common employment of that term, we see that the law upon the statute-book does not enforce itself. And no matter where you find them, law and force are always two distinct things. Law is the regular operation of force. But whence comes that force? who sustains it? who or what gives to it its energizing power? So far as we know or can observe, the force acts in a particular way, which is beautifully in harmony with other workings of other forces, and which, with them, co-operates to produce some great effect. But when we see such phenomena in the lower sphere of human activity, we immediately

infer intelligence and choice, and these are the constituent elements of personality. Why then may we not infer these in the higher sphere of nature's working? How comes it that those who, when they find a flint arrow-head in a bed of gravel, immediately conclude that a personal man must have been there to fashion it, and to handle it, can yet look upon this wondrous fabric of the universe, having on it innumerable marks of design, and fail to infer from it that a personal God has formed and is sustaining it all? Brethren, when I put such questions as these, hard as it does seem to say it, I cannot but feel new force in the old words: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."

But the parallel to the atheism of the materialist is furnished in the practical godlessness of the man who ignores the providence of Jehovah in daily life. For the law that diligence brings success, does not enforce itself any more than the law of gravitation does. The prosperity that comes in that way is as really produced by God as any physical effect is, and so the glory of it should be given unto him. Moreover, who does not recognize, as he looks back over his life, that at its critical junctures, when the train of his fortunes seemed in danger of being wrecked, an unseen hand moved the crossing lever, at the proper moment, and turned it on to the path that led to affluence? We may not be able to explain the "how" of it, but we can all bear witness to the fact. The very term "luck," under which men have veiled their unconfessed faith in something above themselves, is a witness to the truth of what I say. The prosperity of the prosperous man has not been due entirely to himself. A hundred things, all of which were out of his control, have converged and co-operated to produce it, and if one of

them had been different his success could not have been enjoyed.

So of our food, it may be said that but for the health which we have and which enables us to labor, and but for the opportunities which have offered for the selling of our labor, we must have been entirely destitute. But for both of these, we are dependent upon God. Don't talk to me about the laws of health, or about the law of supply and demand. Again I protest that these laws cannot enforce themselves; they are powerless but for the personality that is behind them, and that personality is God. How long will men hide Jehovah from them by the very laws which he is himself sustaining! Let them be warned by the chastisements which in former times have come upon those who have thus refused to see God, even when they ate and drank. When Herod deified himself, tracing his greatness only to his own exertions, the hand of God came forth and laid him low. When Nebuchadnezzar made Babylon the offering which he laid upon the shrine of his own glory, he was sent out a lowing maniac to eat grass with his own oxen. When the tribes of Israel, under Ahab, worshipped law, under the name of Baal, Jehovah shut off the dew and the rain for a season, that they might learn to trace his hand in all things. And if this practical atheism in common life and in philosophy continue to grow among us, we too may look for some signal chastisement, which will compel us to own that God in the thunder, whom we have slighted and despised in the constant beneficence which crowns our board.

II. In the second place, let it be remarked that there are some who see God, but cannot eat or drink. They have a vivid sense of the personal existence of Jeho-

vah, and they feel him always near, but they take no comfort in his presence. Rather, it seems to haunt them as a spectre, and to threaten them as an executioner. They are oppressed with the thought of his omnipresence, and would gladly be "anywhere, anywhere," if only they could be out of the range of his all-seeing eye. Their feelings are thus more nearly allied to those of the Israelites at the base of Sinai, when they heard the voice of the Eternal from out of the thick darkness, and stood afar off, than to those of the elders when they sat down before him to eat and drink.

Now how shall we account for this? The answer is not far to seek. It is caused by a sense of guilt. So soon as man sinned he sought to hide himself from God, and nothing so appalled and terrified him as to be confronted with his Maker. This is evident from the accounts which the Bible contains of the different manifestations of Deity to different individuals. Thus at the burning bush, even Moses "trembled and durst not behold;" and when the Covenant Angel came to Manoah, he was similarly disturbed. So, again, when Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in the Temple, he cried, "Woe is me;" and when Peter beheld the Deity of Jesus through the miracle of the fishes, he exclaimed, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Holiness and guilt are thus mutually repellant, and no man can have real happiness in the consciousness of God's nearness to him, until he is reconciled to him, and has his iniquities forgiven.

You observe that between the shuddering of the people at the base of Sinai, and the feasting of their representatives on the mountain itself, there was the offering of sacrifice, and the entering into covenant with God. That accounts for the change in the manifestation of Jehovah to them, and in their own views

and feelings in reference to him. Whereas before they saw nothing but clouds and darkness, relieved occasionally by the lightning; now they behold as it were "a paved work of sapphire-stone, and as it were the body of heaven in its clearness." Thus it matters everything as regards our feelings toward God whether we be in covenant with him over the sacrifice of his Son or not. If we are not, then ever as we see him he appears to us as he did to Israel when he proclaimed the law, and every tone of his voice is full of condemnation and of menace. But if we are, then the nearer we get to him the more of joy we have, for through the gateway of the satisfaction of law we pass into the realization of his Fatherhood. "No man," says the Saviour, "cometh unto the *Father*, but by me." Others may lead us to God as the Great Supreme, and fill our hearts with dread at the thought of his existence. But only *Jesus* can reveal to us his *Fatherhood;* and he has the right to do that only because by the sacrifice of himself in our behalf he has made it possible for Jehovah righteously to receive us into his household. Through sacrifice, thus, we enter into peace. They who by faith in Jesus have made a covenant with God, have all slavish dread and terror of Deity banished from their hearts, and can contemplate him with reverence indeed; but also with that "perfect love" which "casteth out fear." This is fundamental; and until, through the atonement made for us by our Great High-Priest, we get our sins forgiven, the very thought of God will drive happiness from our spirits. Who is among you, therefore, that trembleth at the vision of Jehovah? Let him repair to the altar, and as he sees there the Lamb of God bearing his sins, and is there sprinkled with the covenant blood, he will behold the clouds and darkness that are round

about the throne disperse, and will sit down in calm security to feast with the King Eternal as his Father and his Friend.

But even among those who, in the judgment not of charity alone, but of justice, have thus entered into covenant with Jehovah, there are some who seem to have had their happiness poisoned by the thought of God. They see him, they are always seeing him; but the vision seems to have paralyzed them, and they go through life halting, solemn, and severe. It seems somehow as if all sprightliness had gone from them. They cannot laugh because God is at their side, and all spontaneousness and naturalness have been frightened out of their lives because of their awe-stricken sense of the proximity of Jehovah. It is not because they have no assurance of forgiveness, but because they have such a weird and distorted idea of the relationship of God to them. They never seem to have risen to the perception of his Fatherhood. "The glorious liberty of the children of God" is a phrase which has little significance for them. They have the idea that he is a master; nay, that he is an austere and severe master, and so they are afraid of him. Their religion takes its hue from their conception of God, and has in its service an austerity and a severity similar to those which they ascribe to Jehovah. Thus the very strength of their faith—because their faith is not so much in a reconciled father as in an exacting master—gives a hard and bare rockiness to their experience. We can see something of this even in such an one as John Milton, for all so much as he had outgrown the narrowness of his generation, when in one of his sonnets he says,

> "All is, if we have grace to use it so,
> As ever in the Great Taskmaster's eye."

"The Great Taskmaster!" Yes, that is how multitudes, who profess to sit at the feet of Jesus, and are really trusting in him for forgiveness, still regard Jehovah, and so long as they view him thus, they may "see him," but they "cannot eat and drink." The workman is never happy when he has the consciousness that from a near loophole the employer's eye is constantly regarding him, to mark whether he is faithful to his trust. But he who is doing his utmost for his father, will always welcome the visit of his parent, and feel that when he comes into the factory he brings new sunshine with him. So, if Christians would "see God, and eat and drink," they must rise out of service into sonship, and learn to think and speak of God as their Father in heaven. This will give sincerity and naturalness to their devotions, activity to their lives, happiness to their hearts, and cheerfulness to their deportment, so that men, as they behold them, will be won by the very radiance of their joy to him from whom their gladness springs.

But there are still others who, at certain times of their history, have had a vivid perception of the nearness of God, while yet they could neither eat nor drink. Affliction has come upon them. Their business perhaps has become involved, or their households have been invaded by sickness or bereavement, or they have been assailed by the abuse of unscrupulous men, and that which ought to have been their greatest comfort in their affliction has, strangely enough, added a new element to its bitterness. They have felt God very near them, but then they have felt as if he were having a controversy with them, as if, somehow, he were alienated from them, and that has made their sorrow all the deeper. But all this has sprung from a misinterpretation of his providence, and that again has its

root in the lack of faith in his fatherhood, whereof I have already spoken. For God does not change toward his people with the varying dispensations of his providence. He loves them always as intensely as he did when he gave his Son to death in their behalf; and like as a father doth with his children, so he does with them. He does not afflict willingly. His chastisements are not matters of passion or of caprice. They are sent in wisdom and in love, and when that is realized by the suffering and stricken one, all poison is extracted from his wounds, so that even on the very mount at the base of which he trembled, he can sit down, with God in view, and eat and drink.

It comes then just to this, that in every case in which the thought of God interferes with happiness, the cause is either personal guilt or a false notion of God's character and providence, and all of these are rectified when we come to him through Jesus Christ, for "in him we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins," and they who have believed in him "have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father." In other words, they "see God, and do eat and drink."

III. Finally, let it be observed, that there are some who, like those here described, "see God and do eat and drink." They are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, his Son; they have learned to call him Father, and the joy of their lives is that they have a constant sense of his presence. When they say, "Thou God seest me," it is not with a feeling of uneasiness, like that of a suspected person who feels himself watched by some detective; but rather with an emotion of satisfaction, because they know that one is beside them who

can make provision for every emerging necessity, and find for them also, as for Hagar, a fountain in the desert. When they think of him, it is not so much as the Great Creator, Ruler, and Judge, as the Father; and because they can say "Our Father," they have a sense of ownership in all his attributes and possessions. They have accepted his own assurance, "I am the Lord thy God," and his omnipresence is the very joy and rejoicing of their hearts. He is not simply "the background" of their lives, but rather the very sunshine in which their whole experience is bathed. What the light is to the landscape, revealing all its beauties and painting all its flowers with their variegated hues, that God is to their lives. Their food is sweeter, because it comes from his paternal hand. Their success is more delightful, because they can trace it to his goodness. Their very afflictions are transmuted into blessings when they think of them as coming from his love. Nor is this all: the works of nature—if I may use that phrase, which seems so atheistic—the works of nature have new interest in their eyes, because they trace them to his hands. And the providence of every day, as it is spread out before them in the public prints, has an intensified importance in their view, because it is the providence of their Father. Then, on the other side, the work in which they are engaged from day to day becomes a sacrificial thing, for they are offering it to him. Their study of history is a perusal of a new volume of his Word, for still "he doeth according to his will among the inhabitants of the earth." And even science, which so many in these days falsely accuse of being essentially atheistic, acquires a holy dignity in their eyes, because it is the unfolding of his works who made all things very good. The very landscape has new beauty, because they see him as they look

upon it. What the quiet, undemonstrative bard of Olney has so beautifully said, speaking doubtless from his own experience, is true of each of them :

> " He looks abroad into the varied field
> Of nature, and though poor, perhaps, compar'd
> With those whose mansions glitter in his sight,
> Calls the delightful scenery all his own.
> His are the mountains, and the valleys his,
> And the resplendent rivers. His to enjoy
> With a propriety that none can feel,
> But who, with filial confidence inspired
> Can lift to heaven an unpresumptuous eye,
> And smiling, say, 'My Father made them all.' "

Thus the sense of God's presence, or the vision of God by the inner eye of faith, as he has revealed himself through Christ, mitigates our afflictions, and gives a new and distinctive element of enjoyment to our blessings. It is not a melancholy thing, which poisons every other experience. It is not, like the sword of Damocles, a threatening thing, that keeps us from sitting down to the feast. Rather it is itself that which gives the feast its real glory, and the festival to us is twice a feast because *he* is there. *He* makes the brightest element in our blessings ; *he* gives to us the real joy of our prosperity. And when affliction comes *he* mitigates it with his sympathy and cheers us under it with his fellowship. He comes to us not as a spectre in the night, but as a father, to lap us in the mantle of his love. "Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure," alike are sanctified by his presence, and no darkness for us could be so dense as that which would envelop us if we were to be deprived of him. It seems but a small matter to the materialist to say, with flippant thoughtlessness, "We know nothing of God." But his atheism is my orphanhood, and I cannot, I will not,

let him rob me of my Father. One of the darkest nights of my life was when I lost my earthly father; yet by and by that night ended in day, because I "saw God, and did eat and drink." But to be deprived of God! To be driven into the dark negation, "No God! no God!" Ah! that were a still blacker night, with no succeeding day; and nothing can drive me into such a dreary region of darkness unrelieved! No! thanks be to the revelation of Jesus Christ, I have learned to know God as my Father, and his presence, unlike that of the grinning mummy at the Egyptian feasts, has no terror in it, for I "see him, and can eat and drink."

To which of these three classes, my hearer, do you belong? Are you among those who eat and drink, but do not see God? or among those who see God, but do not eat and drink? or among those who see God, and eat and drink? Examine and see; and if you have no joy in your thought of Jehovah, or if you have no thought of him at all, let me beseech you now to let Jesus introduce you to him as the Father, and then the presence of the Lord with you will become the very sunshine of your hearts; for the confidential fellowship of Paradise will be restored, and you will walk with him not in the cool of the day merely, but through all its happy hours. Try this, my hearer; it will sanctify sorrow and sweeten pain, and make even prosperity more joyous; and when death comes to you, it will only introduce you to that celestial abode, where, in the highest sense which the words can express, it will still be true of its inhabitants that they "see God, and do eat and drink."

WHO IS THIS?

MATTHEW xxi. 10.—"And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?"

IT was the first day of that memorable week on which the Son of Man was crucified. One last appeal was to be made by him to the people of his own nation, and that it might be formally presented he entered Jerusalem as a king and claimed the allegiance which was his due. As he rode along, his immediate followers attended by a great multitude scattered palm branches on the way, and rent the air with their hosannas. But when he had reached the heart of the city the whole population was stirred, and one question rose to every lip, "Who is this?" The question of that day is the question of this age. Let us see if we can give it any satisfactory answer.

Every man who reads the New Testament with attention must form some judgment about Jesus Christ. He may not express it fully to others, or even formulate it distinctly to himself, but he cannot help coming to some decision regarding him which in due season will influence his life. Other books may, and frequently do treat of subjects concerning which we are not called to come to any determination, or on which we may not have interest enough to stir us up to form a judgment. It is of no great moment to me, for example, whether beauty have its seat in the object looked at or in the soul that is looking at it, and philosophers may debate about that as long as

they please without affecting me in any way by their discussions, for, however they may settle it, I will continue to enjoy as much as ever the delicate coloring of the violet, the blue expanse of the sky, the gilded glory of a gorgeous sunset, and the sparkling majesty of the midnight heavens. So again, what call have I now to settle such questions as these, "Was Brutus justified in taking part in the assassination of Cæsar?" "Was the execution of the first Charles a righteous act?" "Who wrote the letters of Junius?" These and similar historical and literary topics may occupy the youths in our debating societies, and may be useful enough to them as whetstones for the sharpening of their intellectual powers; but their settlement one way or another is not required of us by any imperious regard for our own temporal or eternal interests.

In the case of the New Testament, however, it is quite otherwise, for that book raises questions which touch the heart, the history, and the destiny of every man, and no careful reader of it can lay it down without feeling himself compelled to come to some decision about its statements. Now to ascertain what that decision is, we have simply to put the question of my text, since Jesus Christ is so identified with the contents of this book that a man's thoughts of it will largely determine what he thinks of him, and his view of Christ will, on the other hand, in a great degree determine what he thinks of it. This, then, is a testing inquiry. It touches the very central object of revelation, and enables us at once to come to an issue with ourselves on the great matters of sin, salvation, incarnation, atonement, retribution—in short, on all those topics which arise out of or are connected with our relation to God. According as we answer it we take

our places with Christ or against him, and our reply will determine at once our religious creed and our ordinary conduct.

It will determine our religious creed, for if we believe that Jesus Christ was an impostor, then we must also deny that the Bible is a revelation from God, and throw ourselves back upon the dim and misty vagueness of mere natural religion. If again we regard Jesus Christ as only a man, a distinguished man, even perhaps the very greatest of men, then we thereby deny the universal depravity of the race, maintain the ability of man to save himself, repudiate the sacrificial character of the death of Christ, and declare that all he did was to leave us an example that we should follow his steps.

On the other hand, if we take the view which is presented to us by the evangelists and apostles, that Christ is the incarnate God, then out of this there of necessity arise these other truths: that man is fallen and needs a Saviour; that no one can save him but the Son of God in human nature; that even he could save him only by his obedience unto death in the room of the race; and that now he is exalted to give repentance and the remission of sins. Thus all the articles of a man's creed are, in some sort, involved in the view which he takes of the person of Jesus Christ.

Nay, even as regards these other questions, of which so much is said now, as to the possibility and reality of miracles, the nature and effects of divine inspiration, and the proper method of Scripture interpretation, a man's views will be shaped by the answer which first and before all he has been led to give to the inquiry in my text. If Jesus be incarnate God, then the miracles, instead of presenting difficulties,

are works which it was perfectly natural for *him* to do; while, if his divine dignity be denied, there is no longer any use in retaining faith in the reality of his miracles.

But not alone in the settlement of such doctrinal matters does this question affect us; the reply which we are led to give to it determines also our daily character and conduct. Is Christ a mere man, no more to me than any other of the great teachers whom the world has seen? Then I will prosecute my work on earth as independently of him as I do of Socrates, or Plato, or Zeno, or Seneca, or any other of the great moralists of the past. He has no intimate connection with me, and my life will be affected by him only as slightly as it is by some far-off fellow-mortal. The influence which he has on me will only be that of a man, separated, too, by long centuries from the stirring tumult and busy activity of this modern age. His words may dwell in my memory like those of some Grecian sage, and now and then I may turn to them and read them anew, as the scholar reads the dialogues of Plato, to have my admiration excited, and my intellect stimulated; but that is all. He will not preside over my life, and I will not feel myself under any obligation to do or to refrain from doing anything out of regard to him.

But if it be that he is incarnate Deity, the Son of God, and yet the Son of Man, the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; if it be that, as our Mediator and Redeemer, he died for our sins, and rose again for our justification, and is even now at the right hand of God, then my belief in him as such puts a new spirit in me and gives me a new motive, yea, changes for me the whole significance of life. Morality henceforward becomes for me "the love of him."

Everything I do, I try to do for him. I endeavor to reproduce, as far as I may, his life in mine, and every object in external nature becomes to me a preacher, and a memorial of him. That beautiful star, last in the train of night and first in the forehead of the morn, sings to me of Him who is "the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star;" that sun shedding his benignant rays over the earth, tells me evermore of Him who is "the sun of righteousness with healing under his wings;" the bread which I eat comes to me as a symbol of Him who is "the bread of life;" the water which I drink reminds me of the living water whereof who drinks shall never thirst again; yea, now Christ is seen in everything, and everything is done for Christ.

Now when to these considerations you add that in this book Christ is represented as having many times over claimed to be incarnate God, you will see how impossible it is to read it without feeling one's self forced to decide whether he is so or not; and you will begin to understand how in this age of controversy the battle has kept narrowing in and in until now it is being fought entirely on the question of my text. The "Lives of Christ" which this generation alone has seen would make of themselves, for size at least, a very respectable library. The free-thinker feels that if he would make good his negations, he must by all means demolish this claim which Christ has put forth. He can neither accept him nor leave him alone, and the humble Christian is led by passionate devotion to his Lord to defend his claim with all his skill. This is felt by both alike to be the key of the position, and when such a conflict is waging we must take a side. We cannot help ourselves. We are already with the one party or the other.

What, then, do we think of Christ? Who, then, is Christ? There are mainly four answers which have been given to this question. Some have written him down as deceiver; some have regarded him as a self-deluded enthusiast; some have rested in the conviction that he is merely a man, and others have accepted his own testimony and believe that he is the incarnation of Deity.

It is scarcely likely that there should be any one here this morning who believes that Jesus was an intentional and deliberate impostor; but if there should, it is pertinent to say to such an one, that if Christ designed to deceive he very evidently went the wrong way about it. An impostor invariably takes the pathway to immediate success. He will not provoke unnecessary hostility, lest his claims should be too minutely investigated and their hollowness exposed. He trims his sails as the wind of popular opinion blows, and seeks to go continually before it. Now it is well known to every student that in the time of Christ the Jews' ideal of what their Messiah was to be was entirely different from that which Jesus presented. They expected him to be a temporal prince, and hoped that he would deliver them from that foreign dominion under which they groaned. Nay, even the disciples of Jesus themselves were found nursing this fond anticipation, and repeatedly expressed the same view which was cherished by the common people. On one occasion, indeed, there seemed nothing wanting on his part to secure the universal adherence of the multitude to him as Messiah, but the proclamation of his earthly royalty. Yet he refused to yield to the popular clamor, and because he would not be the king they wanted, many went back and walked no more with him. Here, then, is a circum-

stance which is utterly inconsistent with the idea that he meant to deceive.

Moreover, it is impossible to conceive that one having the moral qualities which the evangelists have portrayed in their description of Jesus, could have intended to impose upon mankind. Consider the attributes of character by which he was distinguished. His meekness and humility were equalled only by his honesty and benevolence. There was about him a conscientious thoroughness which was carried out at every sacrifice, and his Sermon on the Mount evinces that, above and beyond all other things in religion, he delighted "in truth in the inward parts," and held in utter abhorrence that cold and hollow ritualism which is content with "the form of godliness" while "denying its power." He never enticed a man to follow him by false pretences. He never sought to gain adherents by dazzling the eyes of his hearers with bright visions of unbroken ease. He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow me." He desired those who came to him to "count the cost," lest, meeting unexpected difficulties, they should be discouraged. Now, if he was thus frank, fair, and candid in this matter, is it consistent with probability to suppose that he was deceitful in regard to the claims which he put forth to be received as the Son of God?

But if this view of Jesus Christ be untenable, equally so is that which would explain his pretensions (so called), by alleging that he was a fanatic or enthusiast. Let it be remembered that the records which contain the story of his claims do, at the same time, give such an account of his sayings and doings as produces upon us the impression that his mind was pre-eminently healthy, and his intellect ad-

mirably balanced. As he is here represented to us, he is mentally full-orbed and complete. In other men we discover that, no matter how great they are in some respects, they are signally deficient in others; but in Jesus we have "the vision and the faculty divine" by which the poet is distinguished, and along with that the philosophic character in its highest development, while at the same time we have the sagacity and shrewd common-sense of a most practical man. There is in him thus a wonderful harmony of intellectual opposites, and we cannot read the account of his treatment of the different classes of men with whom he came into contact without having the conviction forced upon us that he was no crazy fanatic or hair-brained enthusiast. Even Renan admits that "his admirable good-sense guided him with marvellous certainty," that his "leading quality was an infinite delicacy," and that "he laid, with rare forethought, the foundations of a church destined to endure." But if all this be so, we cannot accept the hypothesis which accounts for the claims which he put forth by alleging that he was a weak enthusiast.

Yet if he were neither a wilful deceiver nor a deluded fanatic, is it possible to rest in the view that he was a mere man? This is the position taken by many in these days. They believe in the intellectual greatness and moral pre-eminence of Jesus. They are as far as we are from imputing to him anything like falsehood or fanaticism, yet they falter at the acceptance of his Deity, and regard him as only a man—in some respects the greatest of men, but still no more than a man. Now over against this it might be enough to set the unique character of these sacred memoirs. There is in them a quality which you search in vain for elsewhere, and which the soul instinctively

recognizes as divine. You know at once the difference between divine and human products in other things. You do not mistake the Nantucket light for a star, and in looking over a beautiful landscape you can easily tell what is man's work in it and what is God's. So I think it is with these four biographies. You read the lives of earth's greatest ones, and you feel that after all they were but men. You read these sketches, and you are constrained to say that Jesus was more than man. There is a clearly perceived difference between him and men in general, a difference as marked as that between the lakelet which the merchant has made to adorn his park, and the beautiful Lake George sleeping on a summer evening among the hills. You may not be able all at once to define what it is; but you feel it instinctively, and when you have pondered awhile you begin to understand it, so that you write over each of the gospels, "*Jehovah shammah*, the Lord is there."

To some, however, it may appear that in thus putting the case I am evading the question, and though in a matter like this I believe that the intuition of the heart is really of more value than the logic of the head, I shall not shrink from going farther, and presenting weighty reasons for my acceptance of Jesus Christ as the God-man.

Let me say, then, that the merely humanitarian view of the person of Christ involves in it the gravest intellectual difficulties. Put the supposition that a young Jew, educated at Nazareth, and living there as a common carpenter till his thirtieth year, came forth at that age before his people and spoke the discourses which are here attributed to Jesus Christ. I say nothing now about his miracles—indeed, throughout my argument, I shall not place any weight upon them

—but I restrict myself to his discourses. See what a depth of philosophic insight they evince. Behold what a grasp of moral principles they take. Mark with what originality they are characterized. They who listened to him, even with prepossessions of antagonism to him in their hearts, were constrained to say, "Never man spake like this man." How then shall we account for the genesis of such an intellect?

He could have learned nothing from the philosophers of Greece, for the limitations of his circumstances prevented him from becoming acquainted with their works. He was not beholden to any of the schools of thought in his own country, for scribe and Pharisee were alike condemned by his far-reaching utterances. Usually, when a great man appears, there is something in his age or education that will in some measure account for his pre-eminence. But there was nothing in the Palestine of his day that can in any degree explain the excellence of Christ. The noblest thinkers of the world have not been isolated peaks standing out in solitary grandeur from some level plain. Rather they have been, so to say, the highest summits of a mountain range of great ones. But Christ stood alone.

And there was something peculiar in his intellectual solitude. The difference between him and other thinkers was not such as that, for example, between Shakespeare and other authors. You know all through that Shakespeare belongs to the same species as the others, but Christ constitutes an entire genus by himself. Of Shakespeare the highest thing that has been said is probably this, that "in his soul, as in a mirror, were concentrated all the lights radiating from every point of human observation, and from his soul, as from a mirror, those lights were reflected back in every possible combination of beauty and sublimity, of wisdom

and wit, of pathos and humor." But Jesus Christ was something else than a mirror reflecting that which was on earth around him. He brought something that no human observation could have taught, and which none of the influences at work in the society of his time could have developed. The difference between a Socrates or a Milton and other authors is one of degree; that between Jesus Christ and other teachers is one of kind. In the midst of animosities of the most bitter and bloodthirsty sort, he lifted up his voice to say, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." In an age when the most degrading idolatry was common among the Gentiles, he taught that "God is a Spirit," and at a time when formalism was prevalent among the Jews, he declared that "they who worship God should worship him in spirit and in truth." Where others faltered or feared to tread—as, for example, in treating the matter of a future state—he walked with steady footsteps; and what the highest philosophers of antiquity strained after with utmost effort, and stood as it were on tiptoe even to touch, he handled with the greatest ease. Compare the Sermon on the Mount, or the discourses recorded in the eighteenth and twenty-third chapters of Matthew's Gospel, and the fourth and sixth chapters of John's, with the utterances of the most exalted teachers, and then say if it be conceivable that he who delivered them was no more than a Jewish country artisan, whose life had been spent in one of the lowest villages of the most illiterate portion of the land? The longer you dwell on the merely intellectual qualities of the teachings of Christ, the harder will it be for you, considering his age and the outward disadvantages of his early life, to believe that he was no more than a man.

But the difficulties which beset the humanitarian view of the Saviour's person, from the intellectual side, are as nothing compared with those which it has to encounter on the moral. Remember the honesty and integrity by which he was characterized, and then say how these qualities are to be reconciled with the claims which he put forth as one who had come down from heaven for the express purpose of teaching celestial things, if these claims were not well founded. He enforced humility upon his followers, saying, "Learn of me; for I am lowly;" and again, "He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." Yet how, if he were not really God, can you harmonize that with the fact that he was himself the central theme of all his discourses? for he said, "I am the light of the world," "I am the living bread," "I am the good shepherd," "I am the resurrection, and the life," "I am the way, the truth, and the life," "I am the true vine." He insisted upon the most uncompromising adherence to truth in all those who came unto him. Yet how, if he were not divine, can that be consistent with his own promise of rest and eternal life to those who came to him? If we accept the doctrine of his Deity, we can see how all these were in perfect harmony; but if we believe that he was no more than a man, then I fear we shall be compelled also to give up our faith in his truthfulness and humility, and so we are driven back on the utterly untenable position that he was an intentional deceiver or a foolish fanatic.

It would be wrong, however, to leave the consideration of this subject without dwelling, even though it should be in the very briefest manner, upon the testimony which is borne by history to the Deity of Christ.

It is the nature of moral evil to propagate itself. Its inherent tendency is to increase. Men have never yet of themselves been able to keep themselves from becoming worse. When putrefaction or corruption begins in any material substance it spreads over the whole mass. It cannot arrest its own progress. It cannot purify itself. If it is to be counteracted at all it must be by the introduction of some antiseptic agent which, coming into contact with it, will bring a curative force to bear upon it. Now just this Christ has done for the human race, and the inference is that because he has arrested the progress of the world's corruption, he must be something higher and better than a man. If you would have a crucial instance by which the powerlessness of the world to arrest its corruption is demonstrated, and the efficacy of Christ to meet its need displayed, look at Greece. Perhaps the highest culture ever reached without Christianity was in that land. There you had the most musical language, the most exalted poetry, the loftiest eloquence, the noblest art, and the acutest philosophy, but what were the people morally and religiously? Read *The History of Morals*, by Mr. Lecky, and you will find that society was there one festering mass of corruption. All this went on until a man of Tarsus made his appearance preaching the Incarnation, and telling his hearers of the God-man, the only mediator and priest of the human race, and then even in Corinth, the very capital of the country's iniquity, a check was given to the prevailing impurity, so that after naming some of the worst forms of vice he could say to his correspondents there, "Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." Nor was this a solitary instance; Christ turned the tide for all after-time,

and to-day the sole corrective agents at work upon the moral and spiritual condition of men may be traced to Christianity.

Now if this be so, can we suppose that Christianity is a merely human device? You cannot cure a poisonous fountain by water taken from itself. You cannot change the character of the upas tree by one of its own fruits. No more can you regenerate humanity by that which is only human. If Christianity purifies those who believe in it, then it is not of men but of God, and if Christianity be from God, the Christ in whom it centres *is* God.

Thus the only way of escape from hopeless difficulty of an intellectual, moral, and historical sort, is to accept it as a fact that Jesus Christ is God and man in one person. And when we get to that elevation, and survey therefrom the gospel history, everything in it falls beautifully and harmoniously into its place. The miracles are seen then to be as appropriate to him as his crown and sceptre are to a king. The glory of his birth, baptism, and transfiguration is at once explained. The mystery of his death begins to be comprehended by us, and the majesty of his resurrection and ascension is no longer strange. That which before was a perplexing enigma is now a clear and consistent history, and we feel as we never felt before the meaning of that matchless litany, "By the mystery of thy holy Incarnation, Good Lord deliver us."

But now, supposing that we all receive Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God—what then? What is involved in that reception? It involves, first, that we should implicitly believe his teachings. It is a mockery for one to say that he believes in the Deity of Christ, and then to cavil at his words or to deny their truth. If

faith in him as the Son of God be a genuine thing it will lead to unquestioning acceptance of his statements, ay, even though we may not be quite able to comprehend their full significance. We may learn here from that Martha who has been by many so misunderstood. When Jesus came to Bethany and met her after the death of Lazarus, he replied to her outburst of grief in these words, "Thy brother shall rise again." She answered, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day;" and when to this he rejoined, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" she responded, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." As if she had said, "I cannot quite understand thy meaning; but whatever it be, I am ready to believe it on thy word, for I believe *thee* to be the Son of God." There was true, unwavering faith, which accepted the teachings because it trusted the teacher! and if our reception of Jesus Christ as the God-man be good for anything at all, it ought to carry in it this implicit and unquestioning belief in his words.

Further, if we believe that Jesus Christ is the God-man, there is involved in that an obligation to rely alone on his atoning work for our salvation. It is no true faith in the Deity of Christ which can keep a man at the weariful drudgery of trying to save himself by his own good deeds, or can permit him to doubt that Christ is able to save him. Ah! poor anxious sinner, that art tormenting thyself with the thought that thine iniquities are too great for his blood to wash away, lift thine eyes for a moment from the contemplation of thy guilt, and tell me what thou

thinkest of Christ. Dost thou believe with Martha that he is the Christ, the Son of God? Then whence all thy darkness and despair? Does the work of such an one need to be supplemented by thine? Are the assurances of such an one hypocritical and insincere? When he says, "him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out," is he not speaking with divine sincerity as well as tenderness? and when, upon the cross, he shouted, "It is finished!" did he not mean what he said? Let thy mind rest thus on the all-sufficiency of his work and the truthfulness of his Word, as those of a divine person, and then thy despair will hide itself, as the darkness hides from the brightness of the noonday.

Finally, if we receive Christ as the God-man, there is involved in that reception an obligation to obey his commandments. "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord!" says he, "and do not the things which I say?" Brethren, the practical rejection of our Lord's divinity by the disobedience of our lives is a more prevalent heresy than the theoretic denial of his Deity, and it is far more insidious and pestilential. How many are there who profess in their creed that Jesus is the Christ, the Lord of all, but yet continually exclude him from the sovereignty of their hearts and lives? But what hypocritical inconsistency is this? If Christ be God, the only rightful ruler over the heart, then what have the world and pleasure and mammon and sin to do in the high places of that heart? Have you given him, are you now giving him, the lordship of your lives? If not, let me beseech you to do so now. Begin where Paul began, with the question, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and follow on as Paul followed on, keeping the word of the Christ, at the sacrifice of everything that came into collision with it.

Then when the question is asked, Who is this? the answer will come, not in words, but in deeds, in character, in the influence of your whole earthly career, and it will be to this effect: "He is more than all the world to me. He is my teacher, my friend, my Redeemer, my life, my joy, my hope, my Lord, and my God!"

IF NOT TO CHRIST THEN TO WHOM?

JOHN vi. 68, 69.—"To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."

THESE are Peter's words, and they are like his own noble and magnanimous self. They sprang from the love of his heart, and yet they were deeply rooted also in the conviction of his head. We wrong that devoted apostle when we regard him as a mere creature of impulse, or seek to make it appear that his adherence to Jesus was more a matter of emotion than intelligence. It was the quickness and clearness of his intellectual perceptions that made his impulses so rapid; and though his language was occasionally thoughtless, his faith was no blind credulity, but a rational and well-founded belief. We cannot forget that even the clear-sighted intuition of John did not arrive at a proper idea of the Saviour's person so speedily as did the intellectual acumen of Peter. It was Peter and not John who was the first to say, "Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God;" and when many were leaving Jesus because he would not allow them to make him an earthly king, it was Peter and not John who made the noble answer which I have read as my text.

The circumstances were peculiarly affecting. The spiritual and searching character of the Saviour's words concerning the bread of life had offended the multitude, and they who yesterday had crowded round him to be fed at his hands, were now deserting him

in mingled anger and derision; when, turning in tenderness to his little band of disciples, he said, "Will ye also go away?" and Peter, rising to the occasion, answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

"To whom shall we go?" That is the first question that presents itself when a man awakes to moral consciousness, and feels those inarticulate longings within him which reveal that he is not as he ought to be. The heathen philosopher Plato attempted to account for these spiritual yearnings by regarding them as the result of the reminiscences of a former state of existence, in which the soul had seen the perfect ideas of things which are now somehow lost, and we, with the Bible in our hands, can see how near that was to the Scripture doctrine of the Fall. The soul is not what it once was, or what it was designed to be. From the very grandeur of its ruins man has learned that it was made to be a glorious temple for Jehovah's abode; but, alas! he has learned also, by many painful failures, that he cannot, of himself, reconstruct that spiritual edifice. Like the strain of some sweet song which one cannot himself recall, but which lives so in the memory that he can at once recognize it when it is sung by another; like a name which one is sure he knows, but cannot with all his ingenuity recollect, though he can say what it is not, and can identify it the moment it is pronounced by other lips,—so is the lost ideal of the human soul to the heart that is straining after its attainment. The soul is not what it once was. It feels it cannot make itself what it once was. Its constant cry is, "Who will restore my true self to me?" Nay, more, it recognizes that forgotten greatness when it sees it again. It is not to be imposed

upon by any deceit. It can say, and it does say, when one specimen is offered, "That is not what I seek;" and when another is presented, "That is not what I need;" but when it finds Christ, it identifies its long-lost manhood in him, and exclaims, "Now I have found myself. Rejoice with me, for I have recovered the piece which was lost." The school-boy with his dissected map fits fragment to fragment until at length there is but one vacant space left, and he searches everywhere for that which is to fill it. He cannot make it himself, but when it is brought to him he knows it is the right one, because it fits into every crook and corner of the empty place, and you cannot get him to take another. So the soul recognizes Christ, because he meets its need, fills in its outlines, satisfies its longings, and translates into the language of definite conception those vague and shadowy aspirations which formerly could not formulate themselves into speech.

But besides these sighings after perfection, which of themselves might mark that the soul has fallen, there is within each of us a sense of guilt. Our conscience tells us that we have sinned, and beneath the burden of its guilt the spirit groans, "Who will help me?" We feel we are under condemnation, and we seek for deliverance. As when one finds that he is suffering from a physical disease his first question is, For what medical man shall I send? so, when the sinner awakes to the consciousness of his guilt, his first cry is, "To whom shall I go?" He must go somewhere. He cannot contentedly remain where and as he is. He must apply to some one, and according as he determines to whom he shall repair, the issue will be salutary or disastrous. An all-important question is this, "To whom shall I go?" Some of you, my hearers, have settled it long ago, and have been with Jesus

ever since. But there may be some of you still unsettled concerning it, and some perhaps may have, for the time at least, given it a wrong answer; therefore I crave your attention for a little, that, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, I may set before you some considerations which may lead you to look to Jesus for the life and the happiness for which you long.

To the inquiring Jew, in the Saviour's day, who wished to settle this question, there were four rival systems claiming his attention; for, besides the followers of the Gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus preached, there were three different schools of thought in the land. There were the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes. The Sadducees were the skeptics of the Jewish nation. They had no faith in the supernatural, or in the future life. They maintained that there was no resurrection, neither angel nor spirit. Beginning in a healthy reaction against the interpretations and traditions of the Pharisees, and claiming to stand on the ground of the Old Testament Scriptures, they at length degenerated into rationalism, and ended in what was practically unbelief, much in the same way as in modern Germany the valiant protest of Luther against human authority in matters of belief has in many instances been carried into the extreme of infidelity.

The Pharisees, again, were the high ritualists of the ancient Jewish Church. They conformed to the letter of the Mosaic enactments, and, not content with that, they added a great many things which they professed to have received by tradition, and which they regarded as equally important with the written precepts of the Pentateuch. Theirs was a religion of externalism.

The Essenes were the ascetics of their age. We do

not come into contact with them in the gospel, probably because they withdrew altogether from general society, and formed a separate community which lived apart from the world. They were the prototypes of Monasticism, and sought by meditation, prayer, and self-denial to attain that perfection of character for which they longed.

Now I have been particular in enumerating and characterizing these three sects, because the forms of error which they represented have existed in all ages, and because, singularly enough, the choice of the soul, even in these days, falls to be made between one or other of them and Christ. Still, as of yore, we have to decide whether we shall adopt a system of negation, which is skepticism; a system of outward form or ceremony, which is ritualism; a system of self-commendation to the Almighty, which is asceticism; or the truth as it is in Jesus, which is spirit and life. Let us look at each of these:

Shall we go, then, in the first place to skepticism? Is there anything in that to commend it to our acceptance? Surely no! See how it treats the disease of the human soul! It seeks to cure its malady by denying the existence of any malady within it! It regards the fears of the soul as unmanly, and its convictions as superstitions. But what satisfaction can that give? Can you appease the hunger of a man by trying to reason him into the belief that there is no necessity for his hunger? Will he not turn angrily away from you, saying, "Necessity or not, I am hungry, and argument will not suffice for bread"? Will you quench the thirst of the exhausted traveller by trying to persuade him that it is the merest superstition to suppose that water can remove the craving which he thinks he feels?

Or would you be surprised if, as you spoke to him in that fashion, he were to heap anathemas upon your head for mocking his misery with your sneers? Yet to attempt to take such a course with a hungry or thirsty man would not be more unsatisfactory than is the answer given by skepticism to the cravings of the human heart. It seeks to remove the longings of the soul by denying their existence or by stifling their expression. Its creed is virtually a denial of everything; it says that we know only what we see, and scarcely that; and as for what is unseen, there is no need to disturb ourselves about that; and so it is like a cruel mother, who tries to make her child forget its hunger by putting it to sleep, thereby only postponing and intensifying the evil.

But it does not always succeed even in putting the soul to sleep, and the very efforts made by those who accept it to suppress the nature that is within them attest that they are doing violence to the deepest and truest intuitions of their hearts. Take for instance the following words of one of this class: "To relinquish our personal hopes, and to take instead of them an abstract conception thin as air, is a trial to our constituted instincts harder than any which has yet been undergone, and an anguish from which it is impossible that the soul should not shrink." Surely in such a case the moral instincts of a man are truer than his intellectual creed, and the existence of such inward protests in his own soul ought to keep him from accepting a "thin abstraction" instead of the living God. It is not so easy to be an unbeliever after all! One must do violence to his own nature before he can believe that there is no God and no hereafter. Perhaps no one ever succeeded so thoroughly in beating down all inward obstacles to the acceptance of

materialism as did Harriet Martineau; and yet even as we perused those last letters of hers, in which she flaunts her infidelity before the eyes of her mental mesmerizer, we felt that her words are like the whistling of the school-boy as he runs through the graveyard at the dead of night, and are designed "to keep the courage up." At any rate they are as different in the matter of restfulness from her own former meditations in the sick-room as a starless midnight is from a peaceful, hopeful dawn. The soul will always be true to itself whenever it is allowed to assert its prerogative. It will not accept a scorpion for bread. It will not be mocked with a serpent when it asks a fish. One must choke back its strongest longings, and trample on its most tender expostulations before he can get himself to say there is no God, no heaven, no hereafter, no sin, and no need of salvation. And so, as I have said, it is not so easy to be a skeptic after all.

But how much better than all this, how much safer, how much more philosophical it is to meet the soul's hunger with the bread which God has provided, and its thirst with the water which God has furnished in Jesus Christ! No doubt there are difficulties connected with revelation. None but a fool would deny that; but even suppose revelation, with its Saviour and its gospel, were entirely swept away, *the very same difficulties would remain,* while we should be deprived of the undoubted advantages which revelation brings. The difficulties which arise out of revelation are precisely those which have already emerged in philosophy, and you do not get rid of them by tossing the Bible away. No! you only get rid of the Bible remedy for human sin. The patients in an hospital may be wretched enough. Their wounds may be very painful, their fever may be very high, and altogether their case

may be deplorable. But suppose that they should insist on expelling every medical man and every nurse from the institution, would that improve their circumstances? I trow not; for every evil which they before experienced would continue, and would be intensified rather than mitigated by the change. But would it be otherwise, has it been otherwise with the skeptic and the Bible? Does he get rid of difficulty when he turns his back on the Word of God, and has he reformed the world or given peace to the troubled heart by taking the Bible away? Alas, no! as if to make known the utter impotence of infidelity for good, and to reveal its terrible potency for evil, God at the close of the last century gave France up to its power. The Bible was proscribed. The churches were closed. The Sabbath was abolished, and a vile woman was worshipped as the Goddess of Reason. Then surely would be the halcyon days of peace, the very millennium of infidelity. But how different the result, for all the while the Seine ran red with the blood of the slain, "truth perished and was cut off from the land," "the wicked walked on either side," for "the vilest men were exalted," and order, liberty, fraternity, and peace were "trampled in a mire of blood" beneath the feet of a maddened multitude. O infidelity! if such be thy results, far from me and from those I love and from the country I revere be the adoption of thy dark negations! If thy reign be ever thus a reign of terror, be it mine to bow before the throne of Him whose service is freedom and whose sceptre is love.

But, secondly, shall we go to ritualism? At first that seems more likely to be efficacious, but when we examine it minutely we find that it has mistaken the form for the power. For in what does it consist? It

is the performance of a certain round of external services, the repetition of set forms and phrases, the observance of outward ceremonies—whether appointed by men, like the crossings and genuflections of ecclesiastical enactment, or instituted by Christ himself, like baptism and the Lord's Supper. Now while in our complex humanity spiritual life must take some form, still it must be evident to every one who thinks, that a system which is form, and nothing else, can do nothing to benefit the soul. Form is valuable only when life has vitalized and ennobled it, but the absence of life is the very disease with which the soul is afflicted. How, then, can the observance of that which is external impart the life without which it must itself be dead? To seek for that which the soul needs in any kind of ritualism is to seek for the living among the dead. To attempt to improve our spiritual nature by such means is to begin at the wrong end, for it is the character of the soul that gives its quality to the rite, and not the observance of the rite that quickens the soul. It is the spirit of the worshipper that gives its value to the worship, and not the correctness of the worship that gives regeneration to the heart. The root of the evil is in the soul itself, and no mere outward ceremony can touch that. The application of water to the body cannot cleanse the spirit, the partaking of bread and wine by the body cannot change the character of the soul. The bowing of the knee can no more influence the heart than the bending of the arm, and the repetition of a creed or of a form of prayer, merely as such, has no more beneficial effect upon the heart than the rehearsal of any other words. Forms, in their own place, are but like the garments in which spiritual life arrays itself; yet if there be nothing but forms, they are then only

like the shroud which men lay upon the face of the dead. Therefore the cure must not pass through them to the soul, but through the soul into them, and whenever they are relied upon for salvation, there you will find an evil heart rejoicing in sin while covering itself with the garb of piety. Witness the Pharisees in our Saviour's own time, whose characters he so witheringly exposed, and who revealed themselves in the fact that, though they could not enter into the hall of Pilate on the Passover day, lest they should be defiled, they could yet plot with cunning malignity for the murder of the Lord. Witness the Italian brigand who returns to the shrine of Mary to give thanks for a successful robbery. Witness multitudes among ourselves, who seem on the Lord's day, and in the Lord's house, to be devoutest worshippers, but who upon the Monday are watching every opportunity to take advantage of their neighbors. Formalism, so far from improving the heart, only hardens it the more. It simply substitutes hypocrisy for religion. It whitewashes the sepulchre, but it leaves the corpse festering within. It needs the Christ to come with his life-giving power and cry, "Lazarus, come forth!" and then, when the quickened one appears, the garments of the tomb are laid aside for the raiment of a living man.

The cistern is empty when it is dissevered from the fountain, and the rite is meaningless when it is dissociated from Christ. I must come to the form through Christ if I would have anything of benefit from the form; but if I go first to the form, then there is nothing of Christ about it so far as I am concerned. The ceremony means only what the heart puts into it, and if there be no Christ in the heart there will be no life in the ceremony. Thus ritualism is but the marble

effigy of an entombed excellence. But "a living dog is better than a dead lion," and nobler, more acceptable to God, and more beneficial to the worshippers, is the rudest service in a log-hut, though it be conducted with stammering tongue and in ungrammatical speech, than the grandest ritual—if it be a ritual and nothing more—ever witnessed in the most imposing cathedral which architectural genius has created. From this, then, we must also turn away. It offers to the hungry soul the splendid painting of a feast, but the exquisite skill of the artist does not suffice to change the seeming into real, and the earnest spirit turns indignantly away, as Luther did, disdaining to accept that which is not bread, and seeing a deeper meaning than ever in the Master's words, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

But what, in the third place, shall we say to asceticism? Shall we go to that? For many we admit this system has its charms, and such as they are they are in themselves more noble than those of either of the others on which we have remarked. There is something attractive in contemplation, and there is something, too, at once romantic and poetical in dwelling apart from the hum of busy men, partaking neither in their business nor in their sins. But beautiful as it is in theory, it is useless in practice, for the heart cannot escape from itself, and no change in outward circumstances can regenerate the soul. Within the outer cell wherein the hermit dwells there is the inner chamber of the spirit, from which no seclusion can isolate him, and all the arguments which prove the inefficiency of rites and ceremonies are equally power-

ful in proving the impotence of asceticism to meet our inmost need.

Besides, the whole system of seclusion is one of cowardice. That which the soul requires is the expulsive power of life, by which it can cast out the evil that is in itself, and conquer circumstances so as to make every difficulty minister to its strength. What we need for the noblest service of our generation, and the highest development of ourselves, is not withdrawal from the world, but the disposition to stay in the world and conquer it for the Lord. To the first disciples, indeed, the Master said, Follow me, and they forsook their secular occupations for his service; but these were exceptional instances, and now he calls us to abide in our several vocations, and follow him even while we prosecute them. That which can thrive only in the cloister or the hermitage is not calculated either to benefit ourselves or to do good to others.

Moreover, asceticism is a merely negative thing. The giving up of luxury, in order thereby to commend ourselves to God, is but a form of penance, and is the poor caricature of the strength and happiness of him who, having Christ within him, is independent of external influences, and can enjoy even affluence in such a way as to glorify the Lord. It is a nobler thing to have comfort, and offer that to God through its right enjoyment, than it is to make one's self miserable under the delusion that we shall thereby please him. The salvation which we need is that which fits the soul for service in any sphere, and not the miserable selfishness which seeks to keep itself aloof from men, caring only for its own interests, and utterly indifferent to the welfare of others. Society is necessary to man. He was made to live in it. The instinct of his heart is to seek it, and that which sends him into soli-

tude runs counter to the constitution which God has given him. So, even if it could cure the malady of which the soul is sick, asceticism would still be an abnormal thing. But it does not cure the soul. All the long years that Simeon stood upon his pillar did not bring him nearer God, and it would be possible for a man to lay aside fortune, comfort, society, and everything but the merest essentials to animal life, and yet be at heart no better than when he began. These are but the outer wrappings of the man; the character is beneath them all, and till that is changed there can be no salvation. "I see thy pride through thy threadbare cloak," said one to Diogenes of old, and there is often more of self-conceit and self-indulgence in giving up a luxury than there is in keeping and enjoying it. No, no, my hearers, religion is not such ostentatious self-denial; it consists in the crucifixion of the inner self—and there is but one influence that can accomplish that.

So we come to the fourth question. Shall we go to Jesus? What are his qualifications? Peter will tell us. "He has the words of eternal life." Words! words! and does salvation come through words? Yea, brethren, wondrous is the power of words when they are received by faith. What says the weird old philosopher of Chelsea? "Cast forth thy word into the ever-living, ever-working universe; it is a seed grain that cannot die; unnoticed to-day, it will be found flourishing, perhaps as a banyan grove, perhaps, also, as a hemlock forest, after a thousand years." By words at first men were lured to their destruction, and by words we are to be saved at length. The belief of the serpent's lie brought all our misery upon us. The belief of the truth as it is in Jesus, "the

Word of God," imparts life to our souls. That was no empty boast of his when he said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." What, then, are his words? The time would fail me if I tried to repeat them all, but let me give you this one saying as the essence and epitome of them all: "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." What marvellous words are these, reaching the very seat of the evil! They tell the guilty one that God loves him, and so when he believes them they remove his dread at the thought of the Almighty, and by the belief of them the Holy Spirit in his heart begets in him a "return and repercussion"—to use the good Leighton's phrase—of love to God, and that transfigures everything within him and around. Faith in these words gives certainty where before was doubt, and peace where formerly was despair. It gives life and significance to any form of ritual the believer may adopt, and makes the desert and the crowded street alike indifferent to him, if only he may therein serve his God. It puts into his heart music, the undertone of which is independent of any circumstances; it opens up within himself a fountain which flows on alike in the marts of business and at the communion table; and he begins to know the meaning of the blessed assurance, "Whoso drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but it shall be in him a well of water springing up to everlasting life." In the pardon which Christ proclaims, the soul finds peace and joy; and in the Christ who has procured and proclaimed that pardon, it has discovered and recognized that lost excellence, the idea of which was slumbering within it like a faintly remembered melody, and the longing for which was

its deepest and most constant yearning. That which before was vague is now made definite and distinct, and, as in the case of Paul, the great aspiration of the man is that he may win Christ, and his one great effort is to press on toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Ah, but you say, Can we believe these words of life that fell from Jesus' lips? Yea, verily, I reply, they are the words of him who was approved of God by signs and miracles which he did; they are the words of him who died upon the cross, and rose by his own power from the tomb of Joseph; they are the words of him whose life shines before men's eyes with the radiance of Deity, and if they are not true then is there no truth. But that they are the truth experience everywhere attests. See what they have wrought in those who have most implicitly received them. Apostles believed them, and they lived such lives as earth has never seen surpassed or even equalled. Heathens believed them, and they rose from the vile depths of Roman immorality and Grecian impurity to integrity, chastity, truthfulness, and love. Drunkards have believed them, and cast away their cups. Blasphemers have believed them, and turned in penitent reverence to God. Yea, sinners of every age and degree have believed them, and have turned from wickedness to serve the living and loving God; and everywhere those who are most active in good works are they who most simply and sincerely accept these holy sayings. Christ has put hope into individual hearts, and benevolence into our social life. All that is noble and elevating and purifying in our modern civilization has come from him, and the difference between the world of to-day and that of two thousand years ago has been owing—we affirm without fear of contradic-

tion—to the influence of his words of life. So we say to every burdened, weary, perplexed, and troubled one, with fullest confidence, "Come to him, and he will give you rest."

And when the prophets of our modern materialism are asking us to leave the company of his disciples, we make reply, "To whom shall we go? Find us a better answer to the questionings of our spirits than he has furnished. Show us a better ideal of manhood than he has given. Bring us a better testimony to the life beyond the grave than he has borne, and let us see in the cold realm of your dark negations a love for human creatures such as he has enkindled in the hearts of his followers, and a willingness like theirs to spend and be spent in offices of benevolence. In one word, give us something better than the Christ of these gospels, and then we may accept it; but till then cease your importunity, for your enticements to forsake him are in vain." Till then! ah, what irony has unconsciously escaped me! for never can such a demand be met. Four thousand years the world tried in vain to return to God, and now that he has come to be himself the way we will not give him up for a negation. Go, then, with you everlasting No to those who have no sin, no sorrow, no trial, no temptation—they may accept it if they will; but for us "None but Christ, None but Christ;" he has spoken to us the words of eternal life, and we cannot, we will not leave him, for we know that he will not deceive us.

PRAYERS OFFERED IN IGNORANCE ANSWERED IN LOVE.

MARK x. 38.—"Ye know not what ye ask."

THESE words were addressed to James and John when they came to Jesus with this request: "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory;" but, though they have in them a tone of reproof, we must beware of heaping indiscriminate blame upon the heads of Salome's sons because they presented such a petition. Let it be admitted that their prayer was rooted in ambition, still we may not forget that their ambition was to be nearest Christ; nor can we fail to observe that there are some things in their conduct which are worthy of our praise, and may be imitated by us with advantage.

In the first place, they did ask. Now that was a great thing. How many are there from whose lips no prayer ever ascends into the ear of God! They may have wishes, but they do not recognize that God has anything to do with their attainment of the objects of their desires, and they never come to him with a request. They will consult earthly friends and interest worldly acquaintances in their plans and pursuits, but they have no thought of Jesus. It would seem to them "cant" or "superstition" or "hypocrisy" to ask God for anything, and so they go through the world prayerless. Ah, how many homes there are in which

there is no family altar, and how many hearts there are too proud to ask a favor from the King of kings!

How passing strange is this! Here is a gracious invitation: "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and unto him that knocketh it shall be opened." This is given by the Lord of hosts himself; and yet we, who are poor and miserable and blind and naked, and standing in need of all things, will not act upon it. Were a similar proclamation to be made by any earthly monarch, his palace gate would be besieged day and night with eager, earnest suppliants; but men think it beneath them to be seen begging at the door of heaven. Oh, what has God done to us that we should despise him thus? What ails thee, O man, at Jesus, that thou shouldst spurn his kindness? Let the prayerless among us, therefore, be rebuked by the fact that these brothers went to Christ with their request. It is a great matter when one goes to Jesus for anything, since, by and by, no matter what he begins with, he will be found going to him for everything. Whatever be thy desire, therefore, go to him.

In the second place, these brothers had a definite purpose in coming to him. When he said to them, "What would ye that I should do for you?" they were not taken aback, but they set before him a distinct request. Herein, again, they were greatly in advance of multitudes who perhaps would presume to be their censors; for is it not too true that our prayers are frequently most vague and indefinite? If any one were to ask us at the end of our devotions what we have been requesting, I verily believe that many of us would be at a loss to give a reply. We get into the habit of employing certain phrases so regularly

that they lose all meaning to us, and we go so thoughtlessly to our knees that we never pause, even for a moment, to put to ourselves such questions as these: What do I need? What shall I ask? How shall I make request? If we were going to present a petition to a fellow-man, we would spend a little time in thinking out our supplication; but we rush hastily into the presence of God, without previous preparation, and with no definite aim. We think we ought to say something, and there are certain stock utterances—religious commonplaces, as we may call them—which seem to be the recognized formulæ for such occasions, so we give forth these and call it prayer. But never was there a greater misnomer. All this is mere lip-service, a devotional beating of the air, nay, the most hardening hypocrisy. Men confess sins of which they do not feel the guilt, utter adorations which they cannot appropriate, and offer prayers so general that they may mean anything or nothing. Is it any wonder, brethren, that with such habits among us prayer should be regarded by us as useless, and felt to be uninteresting? Formalism is always dreary and invariably empty; yet the way to remedy that evil is not to give up the exercise, but to have it vivified and glorified by making it a reality; and that will be best accomplished by setting before us a distinct aim. Let us take time to consider what sins we have to acknowledge; let us ponder well what things we need, and having expressed them, let us conclude. I think we might learn much in this matter from the prayers recorded in the Bible. Take that of Abraham's servant when he went for a wife to Isaac, or that of Jacob when he was afraid of meeting Esau, or that of Elijah upon Mount Carmel, or that of Hezekiah when he received the blasphemous letter of Rabshakeh, and we

shall be struck with the simple, honest, business-like straightforwardness of the requests they make. These men had a purpose in view, and they went right at it. So should it be with us, and by this means we shall make our devotions interesting to ourselves and powerful with God. Ever, therefore, as we go to our knees or come to the mercy-seat, let us hear Jesus saying unto us, "What wilt thou that I should do for thee?" and the answer to that question will be real prayer. As it is, we ask a great many things which we don't want, and omit many which we really do desire.

In the third place, these brothers were honest and sincere in their request. They did not pretend to ask this in order to keep up the appearance of faith in Jesus and attachment to him. They actually desired to have the positions for which they made petition. Now here again they were greatly better than many who would be ready to censure them, for we too frequently ask for things which we are taught that it is right to pray for, rather than for those things which we actually want. We soar aloft into spiritual regions on the borrowed wings of David, or some other of his brother psalmists, though we have little or no community of sentiment with them; and the troubles of our every-day lives, in connection with which we really want help and direction, we leave altogether out of the account. We fancy that God cannot be concerned about such things. They seem to us too trivial and secular to speak about in prayer, and therefore we say nothing concerning them, and go on to express desires for things in regard to which we are indifferent, while the weight of unspoken cares lies dull and heavy on our hearts. It is a thousand times better to pray sincerely about matters which, though they should be both secular and small, are

real to us, than to pretend to pray about spiritual things which are at the time no better to us than myths; and it would be a good rule to lay down for our observance, never to ask anything unless we feel that we truly want it. No doubt this would greatly abridge the length of our devotions, but such an abridgment would be an immense improvement. If we cannot say we are sincere in our petition, let us not present it; and if there be anything about which we are really anxious, let us give expression to that. Let us not make request in such a way that if God were to take us at our word we should be covered with confusion, and compelled to own that we were only pretending; and if we use a form, let us see to it that we first pour our hearts into the mould which it has made for them.

But you are ready to ask, if all this be true—if the sons of Zebedee were both direct and sincere in their petition here presented—what was there to be blamed in the matter? And to this I answer that, apart from the earthly ambition to be above the other disciples, I cannot find much that was wrong about their prayer. The Saviour, in the words of my text, does not blame them for presenting it. All he says is that they did not know either what they asked or what was involved in the granting of their request.

They wished to be beside him in his glory, but as yet they had a very false conception of what that glory was. They dreamed that his monarchy was to be visible and temporal. They thought not of him as a spiritual king, whose empire would be over the minds and hearts and consciences of believing men. They had not yet learned that greatness in his *régime* was to be no outward gift of patronage, like that bestowed

by earthly potentates, but pre-eminence in character. They had not discovered that the glory of his realm is glory in holiness, and so, in asking to be one on each side of him in his glory, they had no other idea than that which they derived from what they had heard of the pomp and splendor of an earthly court.

And, egregiously wrong as they were about his glory, they were no less in error as to the things which were involved in the granting of their request. A king on earth can make a baronet or earl by the mere issuing of a patent, and an absolute monarch can place a man at his side, making him the second in the country, as Pharaoh did Joseph, by a single act. These promotions, however, are not necessarily connected with any alteration of character or any process of training. But it is otherwise with holiness, by the measure of which, as attained by his followers, Jesus regulates the different degrees of nobility among them. That is not a thing which God bestows upon a man by a patent outside of him. It is a character which is formed within him. It is not a gift which the Lord confers, as we would say, ready made, and by one act, upon a man. It is the result of a long course of education and trial; and he is the highest in this peerage who, having served his Master best through good report and through bad report, shows likest him in self-sacrifice and purity. By the cross Jesus was elevated to the throne which he now occupies, and he whose life is a sacrifice nearest in value and likest in character to that which Jesus offered upon Calvary will sit nearest to him in glory. Hence the Lord, in his cross-questioning of these petitioners, says, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" But they had no glimmering of his meaning.

Still, as they ignorantly replied, "We can," he answered that they should, and said, moreover, that only to those for whom it was prepared—that is, to those who were uppermost in holiness—could he give the posts for which they were so desirous. Thus he does not deny their request. He simply expounds its meaning to them in words which they would better comprehend when he had gone to his glory, and the remembrance of which, in after days, would do much to stimulate them to follow in his footsteps, if haply their prayer might, after all, be granted. Yea, who knows but now it is fulfilled? James went up in the chariot of the martyr, and John, after a long life of earnest service, during which he had made trial of many persecutions, heard at last the cry, "Come up hither!" and it may be that, in the day when the apostles sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes, these two may be seen next the Lord. Thus the words of Keble may be as applicable to the throne as to the cup:

> "O great apostles! rightly now
> Ye read all that your Saviour meant
> What time his grave yet gentle brow
> In sweet reproof on you was bent."

We cannot tell: we only know that those who are in that position will be those who have been fitted for it by drinking of the cup and submitting to the baptism of the Lord.

This, then, is what the words of my text mean—"Ye do not know what is implied in the terms you employ in making your request, or what is involved in the granting of it to you." But were these brothers singular in this? Is it not in a deep sense true of us, in every sincere prayer we offer, that we know not what

we ask? We may have a definite object in view, and we may think it good and most desirable; but we cannot trace it through all its bearings; we cannot see how it would affect us if it were bestowed on us; nor can we tell what may be required from us before it can be granted. Of the simplest thing we choose to pray for, it may be said we know not what we ask. We cannot tell whether the bestowment of it would be a blessing to us or the reverse, neither can we see by what means God may be pleased to answer our cry. Thus, though it is easy for us to see wherein these brothers erred, it is not so easy for us to keep from error ourselves. There is only One who, in his all-embracing omniscience, can thoroughly discern what is involved in our petitions, and that is God, to whom we make our prayers; and as he is all-wise as well as all-loving, we may rest assured that he will answer all our prayers, if not in the letter, yet in the spirit, and give us that which is best. He sees the end from the beginning, he knows what we ask, and thus his answers come, not so much according to what we request as according to his knowledge of the character of those things for which we pray, and of the effect which the bestowment of them would have upon us.

Now if we will but remember these two particulars —first, that we do not know the true character and certain effect upon us of the things which we ask from God; and, second, that we do not understand always what is involved in the granting of our requests—we shall begin to comprehend why so many of our prayers are apparently unanswered, and why so frequently we fail to recognize answers to our prayers when they really do come.

We shall comprehend why so many of our prayers are apparently unanswered. Your little boy comes

to you and cries importunately for a knife. He will not be gainsaid. Your negatives he refuses to receive; and as you persist in declining to accede to his request, he is prone to think harsh thoughts of you; he begins to pout and to say in murmuring undertone, "I never do have anything." He does not understand your procedure. He imagines that what you do in wisdom and real love to him, has been prompted by the simple spirit of contradiction and the mere desire to show your authority. He does not see that by the gift which he is seeking he will injure himself and do serious mischief in the home. He knows not what he asks, but you do, and out of honest affection for him you refuse it. Now it is similar with us in our prayers to God. You ask him, say, for success in life, having in your mind that external prosperity which consists in the possession of this world's goods. But God's view of success is a very different affair. In his estimation success consists in what a man is, not in what he has, and he gives you that success by denying you the other. He sees that if he were to bestow upon you riches and honor and rank and fame you would not be able to carry all these things with safety. He knows that such prosperity as you desire would be to you like an edge-tool in an infant's hand, or that its result upon you would be that you should be "full and deny him," and, therefore, he declines to bestow it.

Again, you have some special trouble pressing upon you. Like Paul, it may be you have a thorn in the flesh. Health may be a blessing almost unknown to you. You may never have a waking hour that is entirely free from pain, while yet there is not such serious illness as to incapacitate you for labor. You cannot lay yourself aside, neither can you work with

vigor; and you cry to God for relief. But he does not remove your malady. You do not know what you ask. He does, and he gives his answer in this fashion: "If I were to grant your request your naturally high spirits might run away with you; your health of body would make you indifferent to the higher health of the soul. Let me judge for you, therefore, and deny you the former that you may obtain the latter. The thorn shall remain; only take this for your support, My grace is sufficient for thee, My strength is made perfect in weakness."

Or, once more, you ask for the continued life of one who is very dear to you, and in whom your happiness is almost entirely centred: a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister, a child; yet even as you pray that life ebbs away. Day by day you continue your supplication, but in vain; for in spite of your watching and prayer the loved one dies, and you are left exclaiming, "Is it indeed true that Jehovah is the hearer of prayer?" But here is the solution of the matter: "You knew not what you asked." Jesus did. He saw that the granting of your prayer would only the more thoroughly centre your heart upon an earthly object, and so, wishing to lift up your affections to those things which are above beside himself, he took the beloved one to heaven. He denied your prayer for a time, that in bright and perfect reunion with the object of your affection he might ultimately grant it forever. Say not, therefore, that God heeds you not, though he may seem to deny you the thing which you request. In wisdom and love he is doing all things well. He knows what you ask, and according to his judgment regarding its results upon you, whether they shall be really beneficial or the reverse, he gives or refuses. Thus alike in giving and refusing,

however paradoxical it may seem, he is answering your prayer; and as you look back upon the past you are constrained to say of many occasions that it was good for you that you were denied your request; yea, that the spirit of your prayer was answered while the literal thing asked for was refused.

A beautiful instance of this in the life of the great Church father, Augustine, has often given both consolation and light. He wished to leave Carthage, where he had become deeply entangled in the snares of sin, and to visit Rome, then the metropolis of the world; but his pious mother, Monica, restrained him with her tears, and would not let him go, being afraid that he would encounter still more dangerous snares in the great city. He promised to her to remain; but, forgetful of his duty, he embarked in a vessel under the cloud of night, and in that very Italy to which her affection was afraid to let him go he found salvation and was converted. Pondering in his mind how the Eternal Love had conducted him to where he himself had thought of going only in the frowardness of his heart, he says, in his *Confessions*, "But thou, my God, listening in thy high and heavenly counsels to what was the scope of my mother's wishes, refused her what she prayed for, *at that time*, that thou mightest grant her what was *at all times* the subject of her prayers."

But it is only turning this truth round and looking at it from the other side to say that it helps to explain why we so frequently fail to recognize answers to our prayers when they really do come. Thus you make request for the conversion of one in whom you are profoundly interested; it may be a beloved son or an affectionate daughter; you say, and at the moment you think you feel what you say, that there is nothing of an earthly kind that you would not rather sacrifice

for them than that your child should grow up a godless, christless, careless worldling. But how does the answer come? You see the beloved one stricken by some disease which leaves behind a lifelong weakness and renders anything like active exertion a burden, and at first you are dreadfully distressed; but, as the result of this discipline, thoughtfulness begins to manifest itself, faith is born, conversion is accomplished, and then you read in its answer the full meaning of the prayer which in ignorance you presented.

Or, again, you ask for the forgiveness of sins, and think that the blessing is to come to you in a full flush of peace and joy. But not thus always does God proceed. When the woman desired the living water, Christ said to her, "Go, call thy husband." That was the way he took to grant her request. He began by calling her sins to remembrance, that she might have a real spiritual thirst. So often yet, when one asks pardon, God answers by showing him more thoroughly his sins, even as Jesus once began to cure a blind man by more completely sealing up his eyes with clay. It is as if he said to the suppliant, I am ready to bestow pardon, but before you know its value you must first learn how it is you need it, and you must be brought to hate your iniquity even in the moment that you receive forgiveness.

And, to take only another example, we ask for holiness, we pray to be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light; but while we offer the petition we are like the sons of Zebedee, and have an idea that it can be answered just at once by an external deed of gift. Alas, for our delusion! How painfully does God dispel it. First there may come some outburst of malice on us, and our name may be aspersed, our character vilified, and our motives misconstrued; and

while in dismay we ask, "O God, why is this?" we hear the still, small voice of Jehovah make reply, "This is the way I answer prayer for holiness."

Then there may come upon us sore trial through the backsliding and iniquity of those we dearly love. We expostulate, we weep, we beseech, we warn; but still no effect upon the fallen one is produced, and we go through the world carrying the weight of a living cross, and entering into fellowship with the Redeemer's emotion when to Jerusalem he said, "I would, but thou wouldst not." We wonder at the discipline, and, as we cry, "O God, what is this?" we hear again the answer from the throne: "It is thus I grant your request that you may grow in holiness." Once more, there may come severe bereavement into our dwelling. Our children may be stricken down in dire disease, and one after another borne away to the narrow house; and as we stand confounded and distressed, crying out, "O God, why is this?" the reply comes anew, "It is thus I answer prayers for holiness." Ah! we know not what we ask when we cry for holiness. That prayer is a virtual entreaty that God would never let us alone, lest we should, Moab-like, settle upon our lees. It is a request that he should, by all his means of discipline and purification, work out the whole good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power; that, in a word, he would bring us through what one has called

> "The process slow of years,
> The discipline of life,
> Of outward woes and secret tears,
> Sickness and strife,
> The idols taken from us one by one
> Till we can bear to live with God alone." *

* See *The Name of Jesus, and other Poems*, by Caroline M. Noel, p. 25.

And so, even in our crosses, troubles, afflictions, and distresses, God is answering our prayers, for we knew not what we asked. Are there not many here to-day who can, from their own experience, attest the truth of all I have said? John Newton has given so admirable an expression to what the Christian feels on this subject, that I cannot resist the impulse which moves me to transcribe the beautiful Olney hymn in which it is embodied:

"I asked the Lord that I might grow
In faith and love and every grace;
Might more of his salvation know,
And seek more earnestly his face.

"'Twas he who taught me thus to pray,
And he, I trust, has answered prayer;
But it has been in such a way
As almost drove me to despair.

"I hoped that in some favored hour
At once he'd answer my request,
And by his love's constraining power
Subdue my sins and give me rest.

"Instead of this he made me feel
The hidden evils of my heart,
And let the angry powers of hell
Assault my soul in every part.

"Yea, more, with his own hand he seemed
Intent to aggravate my woe,
Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
Blasted my gourds, and laid me low.

"Lord, why is this? I trembling cried.
Wilt thou pursue thy worm to death?
'Tis in this way, the Lord replied,
I answer prayer for grace and faith.

"These inward trials I employ
From self and pride to set thee free;
And break thy schemes of earthly joy
That thou mayest seek thy all in me."

And what is the inference from all this? Not that we should cease to pray. No, but, because we know not what we ask, that we should be in all our petitions entirely submissive to our Father's will.

Let us not cry any the less fervently, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me;" but let us add only the more earnestly, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt," and we may be sure that either the cup will pass or the strengthening angel will appear.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN HOLINESS.

ZECHARIAH xiv. 20.—"In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, Holiness unto the Lord."

WHATEVER view we take of the reference of this prophecy—whether with some we understand it of the New Testament Church as a whole, or with others we regard it as describing the state of things among the Jews when they shall be converted and restored to their own land—we are equally warranted in explaining the words which I have read as indicating that the great design and ultimate result of the diffusion of the gospel is to promote holiness.

This is the topic to the illustration of which I mean to devote the discourse of this morning, and I have been led to turn your thoughts to it now because I believe that it is by professing Christians generally either forgotten or misunderstood. In the view of many salvation is simply deliverance from punishment, and though they would shrink from saying roundly out, "Let us continue in sin that grace may abound," yet they are strangely jealous of all enforcements of personal holiness. So long as sinners are exhorted to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" and be forgiven, they regard the preacher as evangelical; but when he goes further and says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be holy," they become suspicious, and think that he is degenerating into the proclamation of what they are pleased to call "mere morality." They forget that salvation is a character

as well as a condition, and that the two can never be really divorced. They seem to have no idea that Christianity is a life as well as a creed, and that the bestowment of forgiveness is not the great end of the gospel, but only a means to the higher end of lifting men from their degradation and making them in heart and in conduct, as well as in name, the sons of God.

To rest in pardon, therefore, as if that were the whole gospel, is a mean and contemptible thing, displaying a disposition of the grossest selfishness; and so we find the very idea of it repudiated by the apostles, who constantly insist on a holy life as the result, and evidence of the reception by the sinner of the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. The Sermon on the Mount is a part of the gospel equally with the declaration, that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The practical portions of Paul's epistles are not inconsistent with, but rather founded upon his great doctrine of justification by faith, and are indeed the development of it to its proper results, and the Epistle of James, with its keen sarcasm and withering exposure of every-day sins, is as thoroughly evangelical as Peter's Pentecostal sermon. It may be profitable, now and then, as contributing to a better understanding of the subject, that we should examine separately the blessings of which salvation is composed; but it would be perilous to forget that the thing itself is one, or to lose sight of the fact that it is an experience in the present, and not merely a hope for the future. We must not allow ourselves to think of it as mainly consisting in the expectation that God will acquit us when we stand before him in judgment; but we should ever remember that when it is really possessed it is

a living character, produced by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and rooted in the simple faith which the soul is exercising in Jesus Christ. In a word, we must constantly regard salvation as deliverance, not only from the punishment of sin, but from sin itself, and we must always bear in mind that it will be consummated only when alike on the soul itself, and on all its employments, there shall be engraven, "Holiness unto the Lord."

I. Bearing in mind these principles, then, let us advance to the consideration of the subject which I have announced, and inquire, in the first place, what holiness is. What precisely do we mean when we say of a man that he is holy? We imply not simply that he is virtuous, but rather that his virtue has a special and peculiar quality. There are persons who are honest, truthful, temperate, chaste, meek, and yet while you could call them moral or virtuous, you would never think of crediting them with holiness. Evidently, therefore, even in our common speech there is a recognition of the distinction between virtue and holiness.

What, then, is that distinction? Is it not this: that the virtuous man regulates his conduct by moral principles alone, while the holy man maintains a close and constant fellowship with the living God? While you are in the company of the one, you are struck with the high-minded honor which he evinces, and are compelled to admire the man himself; while you are in the presence of the other, you are impressed with a sense of the nearness of God, and you cannot but mark the entire submissiveness of the man's soul to him. The one gives you a lofty idea of his own excellence; the other makes you feel the greatness and purity of God: the life of the one may be maintained without

any thought of Jehovah; that of the other is entirely supported by the communion of his soul with God: you may be with the one for days together without being once reminded of the great Supreme; you cannot be with the other for even the briefest space without discovering that he carries God's presence with him constantly, and that it is, as it were, the atmosphere in which he lives, and moves, and has his being. Thus, even in our ordinary employment of the word, there is a recognition of the fact that a holy man is pre-eminently a man of God.

Nearly akin to this is the scriptural significance of the term, for as it is used in the Old and New Testaments it denotes "consecrated to Jehovah." The "holy" thing is that which piety has cleansed and set apart for God, and the holy man, or the saint, is one who is consecrated alike by the blood-sprinkling of Jesus, the renewing of the Spirit, and his own voluntary act, to the special service of the Most High. Therefore, putting the two together, we define holiness to be, so far as it is an inward principle, the maintenance of close communion with God, and so far as it is an outward manifestation, the consecration of the life to God. If, then, this view of the case be correct, holiness is not so much a separate and distinct thing, like truth or temperance or humility, as a disposition of soul lying back behind all these, and giving to each of them its own distinctive peculiarity. It is not any one of the virtues, neither is it the union of all the virtues; but it is the disposition or state of soul out of which they all spring, and by which they are all regulated. It is not first the virtues, and then holiness as the consequence of their amalgamation; but it is first holiness, and then each of the virtues is manifested as occasion may require, and that too in such a way as to

reveal that the mainspring of the man's activity is fellowship with God.

Holiness, thus, is not an outward act, but an inward, all-regulating principle. A man may be benevolent without being holy, he may be temperate without being holy, and so on with every virtue which you choose to name; but if he be really holy, then all these graces will appear in his conduct as things of course, and they will be seen and felt to be a holy benevolence, and a holy temperance, and so forth; that is, they will bear upon them the mark of being consecrated to God.

Thus then the root principles of holiness are constant fellowship with God and unreserved consecration of the soul and life to God. Wherever these two things are not, no matter what else of excellence there may be, you cannot say there is holiness; wherever these two things are, there you have that quality which commands at once the reverence of men and the complacency of God. Here indeed is the crowning excellence of which humanity is capable, and for which it was originally designed. It is a great thing to say of a man that he is characterized by integrity and truthfulness, and is incapable of knowingly doing injustice to another; it is a greater thing to affirm of one that he is distinguished for amiability and benevolence, and goes through the world seeking to make others happy; but I hold it to be the grandest thing you can declare of any man when you allege that he is holy, for that is to affirm that he "walks with God," and that he holds himself and all that he has to be not his own, but the property of the King of kings.

II. But, advancing a step, let us ask how this holiness is to be obtained. Clearly it is not possessed by

every man; nay more, experience and Scripture unite in testifying that no man has it naturally and as a thing of course. Indeed, the very reverse is true. Men do not like to retain God in their knowledge. They do everything they can to avoid having communion with him; and, so far from considering themselves as consecrated to him, they assert their right to themselves, saying—not of their tongues alone, but also of their hearts and intellects and lives—"They are our own. Who is lord over us?"

Now how is all this to be changed? Not, surely, by the individual himself. That at least must be self-evident. From an unholy soul nothing but that which is unholy can proceed. By no mere process of development or natural selection, if I may so speak, can the unholy man train himself into holiness. Neither can this change be accomplished by means of external rites. I can understand how the application of water to the body can be the symbol of the purification of the soul by the Holy Ghost; but that it should be in and of itself the means of cleansing the spirit is a positive absurdity, which, if it were not so commonly believed, might well be considered too ridiculous to be seriously refuted. As well might you paint a house under the idea that you will thereby change the character of him who dwells in it, as baptize the body in the hope that you will thereby regenerate the soul.

But if neither by the man's own power nor by the washing of baptism this holiness is to be attained, by whose agency is it to be produced? The Scriptures answer with the utmost explicitness that we are regenerated by the power of the Holy Ghost. If we inquire into the mode of his operations, indeed, we get no reply. If, for example, we ask how he can work in and upon a man, while not infringing on his free agency,

we are not told, any more than we are informed how God can carry on his work of providence as a great plan which converges to one result, while yet the liberty of no moral being is destroyed. If, again, we wish to know how the Spirit can carry on his operations in and through the soul, while yet it has no consciousness of anything going on out of the usual course of its own working, we are not informed, any more than we are told how he can answer prayer without breaking in upon the uniformity of nature's operations.

But, though silent as to the mode in which it is performed, Scripture repeatedly asserts the fact that regeneration is the work of the Holy Ghost; and while it is true that, so far as his operations on the soul are direct and immediate they are mysterious, it is also true that, so far as they are indirect and through the instrumentality of means, they are easily comprehensible and perfectly in harmony both with our mental constitution and with the circumstances of the case. For how comes it that men are destitute of holiness? The answer is easy. They are sinners, and as such they are both guilty and depraved. Now we have seen that one of the roots of holiness is communion with God. But how can a guilty one have fellowship with the righteous Jehovah? and what communion has light with darkness?

Again, we have seen that the other element of holiness is consecration to God; but the essence of sin is self-will, and so it is impossible that a man can dedicate himself to God until sin within him has been crushed, and he has received such signal mercy from God as shall lead him in gratitude to offer himself a living sacrifice unto him. In order to holiness, then, the sinner needs to be reconciled to God, and to be

made like to God; but these are the very things which are to be accomplished through his belief on the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Ghost. The reception of the Lord Jesus reconciles a man to God, and puts him into spiritual affinity with God. I cannot really accept Christ as my Saviour, and regard his sacrifice as an atonement for my sins, without at the same time placing myself in thorough sympathy with God's views of things. Let me be one with God in regarding the mediatorial work of Christ as the means of reconciliation, and I am one with him in all things else; my heart beats in unison with his, my views on all spiritual subjects run parallel with his, my aspirations are all after those things which he is bringing about; and thus being like-minded with him I can have closest fellowship with him.

Then as to consecration to him, the sight of the means by which his guilt and depravity have been removed produces in the believer's soul a deep feeling of personal indebtedness to God. He cannot lay claim to himself after God has redeemed him to himself by the precious blood of Christ. His gratitude thus takes the form of self-dedication, and no appeals move him more deeply than these burning words of the apostle, "Ye are not your own: for ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's;" or these, "I beseech you, therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Thus it is beautifully apparent that faith in Jesus Christ is in itself adapted to produce those two elements of communion with God, and consecration to him, in which holiness consists, and so in using that means to bring it into existence the Holy Spirit acts in har-

mony with our mental constitution and our moral condition.

It follows, also, that if we wish to have this holiness formed or increased within us we must seek to have faith, strong and abiding, in the Lord Jesus Christ as our Redeemer, and in his death as the propitiation for our sins. This is a view of the cross which is too seldom before our thoughts. In times of awakening, when conscience has been pricked by the remembrance of sin, we are glad to look to Christ crucified as the author of our forgiveness, and we sing joyfully of the pardoning efficacy of his blood; but it should not be forgotten that the death of Christ is the source of our holiness as well as of our peace. It was by the sprinkling of the blood of sacrifice under the old economy that things and persons were set apart for God's exclusive use; for, as the apostle says, "When Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the covenant which God hath enjoined unto you." Now corresponding to this in the new dispensation we may say that it is by the believing reception of Christ as the sacrifice for sin that we consecrate ourselves unto the Lord, and only in the measure in which we enter into the significance of his death will our lives be devoted unto the Lord. Hence to grow in holiness, not less than to have the assurance that our sins are forgiven, we must give good heed to the cross. By that the old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin should be destroyed; by that we become crucified to the world and the world to us; by that we enter into Paul's experience and can say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not

I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Would you be holy, therefore? I have but one answer to give as to the means of obtaining that character. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Receive him as your Saviour and sacrifice, and you will by the Holy Spirit be led thereby to maintain fellowship with God and to consecrate yourselves to him. Realize that Jesus gave himself for you, and you will be constrained to give yourselves to him.

III. But I pass on to look at the further question where this holiness is to be manifested. In the text it is declared that it will be on the bells of the horses, and that is to be understood only as a specimen of a class. The horse is a common animal employed for ordinary purposes every day, and so the prophet would illustrate the principle that under the new economy holiness would not be restricted to any person, place, or thing, but would characterize the believer's life in all occupations and under any circumstances.

The Mosaic institute was in one aspect of it an educational thing, designed to lead the people up to exalted views of God. Hence the residence of his symbolic glory was veiled from ordinary view and considered a holy place; hence, also, the only person in the nation who was permitted to enter that chamber was invested with a holy character, and it was on a plate of pure gold on the forefront of his mitre that these words were seen: "Holiness unto the Lord."

But now, under the New Testament, we have no holy places or holy persons, or rather every true believer is a holy person, wherever he may be is a holy place, and whatever he does is a holy thing. Christ

thus has consecrated our life. He has lifted it up from the lower level of earth to the higher platform of his native heaven, so that everything we do for him, even the simplest service which we render to the least of his saints, is holy, and has the reality of which the high-priest's mitre was but a symbol. Here is the true idea of the Christian life. It is a temple that we are daily building for the indwelling of Jehovah, and every tiniest stone we lay upon it is sacred unto him. It is not a mansion portioned off into separate apartments, of which one is for business and one is for pleasure and one is for religion, but it is an open edifice all of which is for the Lord. Or, to take the Mosaic symbol, it is a tabernacle. In the inner sanctuary are the Sabbath, the communion table, and the closet; in the outer sanctuary are the daily morning and evening altar for domestic worship, the devotional reading of the Word of God, and Christian fellowship with brethren in the Lord; and in the open court there are business and labor, and things which the world calls secular, but round them all alike there is the consecrating curtain which encloses the life as a whole and marks it off as sacred to the Lord.

Brethren, I earnestly desire that you would prayerfully ponder this view of the case, for I know no heresy more dangerous, and few more common, than that of those who think that religion is a thing only for the closet and the communion table, and who imagine that they can leave it behind them when they go to the exchange or to the workshop. The Lord Jesus will have no such allegiance. Wherever you are, if you profess to believe in him, he expects that you will hold yourselves at his disposal, and act as he has commanded. On Monday, as well as on Sunday; in the store, as well as at the communion table; in the count-

ing-room, as well as in the church. To the Christian there should be nothing purely secular. Everything he does, if done as it ought to be, for Jesus' sake, is holy; and the implements with which we work—the needle, the pen, the hammer, or whatever else—if employed for him, have on them, like the horse-bells of my text, "Holiness unto the Lord." Oh, how much better would we labor if, as we toil, there were in our hearts the feeling, "This is for the Lord!" and how sedulously we would keep ourselves from sin if we trained ourselves into the constant remembrance that we are not our own, but Christ's! You do not wonder at the nobility and excellence of Paul's life when in the very midst of the storm you hear him saying, "God, whose I am, and whom I serve." Let us have but that conviction deeply wrought into our souls, and we, too, shall make our lives bright with the effulgence of holiness, and benign with the blessing of beneficence.

To this new covenant priesthood of common life let me anoint you to-day. I ask you not to set out on pilgrimage to the places associated with the Redeemer's life upon the earth. I set before you no tremendous undertaking like that quest of the Graal, for which the good Sir Galahad left the court of his beloved master. I do not bid you leave the haunts of men and spend your days in a hermitage or in conventual retirement. I beseech you only to recognize the importance of common life, and to consecrate that by seeking to do every lowliest thing unto the Lord. Let the merchant be content, for Christ's sake, to lose profits rather than stoop to fashionable dishonesty, and let him treat every customer as if he were the Lord Jesus; let the mechanic seek to make every article that passes through his hands just as he would if he were

making it for the Lord; let the mother brave the scorn of fashion and the ridicule of society rather than yield to customs which disgrace her womanhood, and let her endeavor daily to train her little ones in the nurture of the Lord; let the legislator, spurning the offered bribe, be willing to forfeit the prize of party rather than do what he knows to be wrong, and let him shape his conduct always by the dictates of the Word of God rather than the maxims of expediency, and that will be holiness indeed.

Our sanctuary services and our communion seasons will be little worth if they do not lead us thus to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. But wherever our piety is genuine and our consecration unreserved we shall seek in all things to glorify God. Let the attainment of this be the object for which we pray, and after which we strive. It will add happiness to our hearts and give influence to our lives. It will bring the dry details of business and domestic life into harmony with the devotions of the closet and the fellowship of the sanctuary; we shall have beneath the bustle and activity and anxiety of commerce a hidden joy carrying,

> "Music in the heart
> 'Mid dusky lane and wrangling mart,
> Plying our daily task with busier feet
> Because our secret souls a holy strain repeat."

And in the end we shall receive from the lips of Him whose approbation is eternal honor the commendation, "Well done! Thou hast been faithful in a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." If, therefore, Christ hath redeemed you by his precious blood, see that you consecrate yourself to him; so will your heart be-

come a die wherewith you shall enstamp on all you do, and on all you have, this expressive inscription, "Holiness unto the Lord." But remember, it must be in the heart first! and to have it there you must lovingly and believingly receive Jesus as your Saviour and Sovereign.

THE BUSINESS LIFE OF ABRAHAM.

GENESIS xv. 6.—"And he (Abraham) believed in the Lord."

To prevent misconception, let me say in the outset that my purpose this evening is to trace the influence of Abraham's faith on his dealings with his fellow-men. I shall not attempt to define to you the nature of faith; neither shall I enter into any inquiry concerning the origin of the patriarch's belief in the unity of God, whereby he stands in close and intimate relationship to the three great monotheistic communities of the world, namely, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mohammedan, and is recognized as a Father by them all. My aim is at once more simple and more practical. I want to show you how that which was the great principle of Abraham's life colored and qualified his intercourse with those with whom he was brought into contact in the common details of every-day business. This is a view of his history which has been too largely overlooked. We speak of him, indeed, as "the father of the faithful," but when we do so we have in mind mainly his prompt obedience to God's command when he left Ur of the Chaldees; his patient waiting for the birth of Isaac; his heroic willingness to sacrifice the child of the covenant even after he had received him; and his long sojourn as a stranger in the land which God had promised to give him for his own. These, however, were all peculiar instances. We feel as we read of them that there is and can be nothing precisely like

them in our modern life, and so, though we cannot but admire the spirit which he manifested in them all, they are so far away from us and so high above us, that we get little out of them to guide or assist us in the more commonplace difficulties which we are called to meet. Yet when we go over the history of the patriarch, brief and fragmentary as it is, we find other scenes, which come nearer the ordinary plane of our humanity, and from which we may draw lessons at once of warning and of cheer. Accordingly, my design to-night is to turn your attention to Abraham's dealings with men, that we may learn how faith in God elevates and purifies the conduct in all the relationships of life. I shall confine myself to three incidents which have been preserved with more or less fulness in the sacred narrative.

I. The first is contained in the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Genesis. It would appear that during their sojourn in Egypt the wealth of Abraham and Lot, which consisted largely in cattle, had greatly increased, so that when they returned to the place between Bethel and Hai, where he had built his first altar in Canaan, "the land was not able to bear them that they might dwell together." The first result of this lack of accommodation for them both was a strife between their respective herdmen, and foreseeing the complications which would inevitably arise, and which might end in their own utter estrangement from each other, "Abraham said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen, for we be brethren. Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if thou wilt take to the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if thou depart

to the right hand, then I will go to the left." And as the issue, Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan.

Now, how admirable was all this! Many good reasons might have been given by Abraham for claiming the first right of choice for himself. For one thing, he was the older man, and naturally might have expected that Lot would defer to him. For another thing, he might have reminded Lot that it was not he who had accompanied Lot, but Lot who had accompanied him, when together they had left their Chaldean home, and might have insisted that, simply on that ground, it was Lot's place to yield the preference to him. But no! he gave up all such claims of priority, and in a manner at once chivalrous and disinterested said, "Is not the whole land before thee?" Now, when we ask how Abraham came to act in this way, we see at once that his conduct was the outgrowth of his faith in God. For observe, in this very connection, indeed in the very middle of this history, it is said, "The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land." Now these were idolatrous and selfish tribes. They were at that very moment filling up the measure of their iniquity on account of which the land was taken from them and given to Abraham. It would never do, therefore, for the worshippers of the true God to quarrel before them. That would only give them occasion to blaspheme Jehovah's name, and so bring his worship into contempt. Therefore, out of regard to the honor of the Lord, Abraham was ready to sacrifice his worldly interest rather than do anything which would tend to compromise the religion he professed. Moreover, the Lord had promised to provide for him. Ever since he had left the far land of Ur, he had looked upon himself as the ward of God, and he was quite sure that God would take care of him. So, without either hes-

itation or misgiving, he made this proposal to his nephew, and as a proof that he had not miscalculated, we are told in the concluding verses of the chapter that God appeared unto him, renewed the promise of the land of Canaan, and guided him to the plain of Mamre, near to that city of Hebron which to-day bears in its name El-Khulil—the friend—the memorial of his connection with its neighborhood.

But now, rising from this old history and looking over the face of modern society, what "envying, strifes, wraths, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults," might be prevented in households, neighborhoods, churches, nations, by acting on the principles which animated Abraham here? We cannot imitate his faith in offering up his son upon the altar, but we might profitably follow his example in these matters of courtesy and disinterestedness. For how far we are, in all the relationships of life, from doing anything of the kind is very well known to all of us. There for instance are two men in the same business, and there is not enough for both; but the one happens to have more capital than the other, and so he commences to undersell him by putting down his prices to a figure that is absolutely dishonest, and then, when he has closed his neighbor up, and secured all the trade for himself, he begins to reimburse himself at his leisure. In the good old days of the fathers, the maxim used to be, "Live and let live," but now, in the selfishness of competition, men trample each other down, and virtually say, "Die, that I may live." Or look at it in another sphere: there are two railway companies, each connecting the same great centers of commerce with each other. There is enough probably for both, if they were only to be mutually

considerate. But so far from that, each wishes to have the larger share; and so they run each other down and down, until shareholders are ruined, and employés are ground to the lowest farthing; and then! such scenes as were lately witnessed in the land come to alarm and appall.

Nor is this evil confined to commerce. To the disgrace of our Christianity, there is the same suicidal rivalry among churches. You shall have a small rural community, with a population only sufficient to sustain properly one Christian minister, who might also meet all the demands of the place. Perhaps the Methodists, with their well-known promptitude and zeal, are the first to see its needs, and they erect in it a house of worship, in which for a time all meet in harmony. But by and by the few Episcopalians among them have a strong desire to enjoy their service; then the few Baptists among them wish to withdraw to a church of their own; then the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians, not to be behind the others, must have their separate establishments; and so at length there are four or five weak and languishing societies, supported too perhaps by denominational home missionary funds, where there might have been and ought to have been but one. All this while, too, there are new villages in the West springing up year after year, in each of which it is hard for our benevolent associations to sustain for the time even one evangelistic agent. Now what shall we say to these things? Do they not all spring from our lack of consideration for each other? Is not that itself a result of our deficiency in faith such as Abraham had? And are not the Canaanite and the Perizzite laughing us to scorn? You say to me that competition is the life of trade. But I reply that trade is for the community, not the community for trade. You tell me

that denominationalism has its uses, and I am not here now to dispute that; but I reply that, whatever these uses are, denominationalism is for Christianity, not Christianity for denominationalism, and if one of them must go to the wall, I say, perish denominationalism, that Christianity may live. Is it so, my brethren, that neither business can thrive nor churches be advanced without selfishness that tramples others down? What is your faith in God worth if you can believe that? I had rather lose all I have than become rich by ruining another man. And if a new church can be started only by undermining and destroying one already in existence, I would not, knowingly, be guilty of helping to establish it. There is plenty of room in the world, and plenty of work to be done in it for God, and if we wish to do that work, let us go elsewhere and begin. Then, as we go, we may find that we too have risen to the height of Abraham's faith, when he left his father's house and went to the land which God would show him.

II. The second incident in Abraham's life to which I would direct your attention is described in the fourteenth chapter of this same book. We have there the first written record which the world contains of war, and from it we learn that the Eastern tribes had made the inhabitants of what is now the Dead Sea Valley tributary. For twelve years the vanquished cities were content to remain under this yoke; but, rebelling in the thirteenth year, they were in the fourteenth invaded by their oppressors. At first Abraham, as a stranger and sojourner in the land, took no part with either combatant; but when he learned that the invaders had not only conquered their former vassals, but also carried away with them his kinsman Lot as a

prisoner, he armed his trained servants, and pursued them up the valley of the Jordan, and smote them, and "brought back all the goods, and his kinsman Lot, and the women also, and the people." On his return, and when he had come near to the site on which Jerusalem afterward stood, he was met by two very different personages. The first was that mysterious monarch Melchizedek, concerning whom so much has been written and so many different theories have been maintained. I enter not now on the consideration of any of these, but take the narrative in its simplest sense. To me, then, he seems to have been the one prominent representative of the worship of the true God remaining in the land. He combined in himself the two offices of priest and king. In these capacities it is quite likely that he was already known to Abraham, and as being one in their faith so far (for Abraham seems to have been more advanced than Melchizedek, inasmuch as God to the latter was the Most High, and to the former Jehovah), they were naturally drawn to each other. Abraham was all that Melchizedek was, and a little more. Still, recognizing in the king a priest of the true God, he willingly received bread and wine from his hands, and gladly consented to be blessed by him in his official capacity, while he gave to him, as the representative of God, a tenth part of the spoil.

Very different was the other personage who stood by, perhaps with undisguised scorn, while all this interchange of spiritual communion was passing between Abraham and Melchizedek. He was Bera, the King of Sodom, one of the vilest cities the world has ever known, and probably himself one of its vilest inhabitants. With something of haughty condescension in his manner, he said to Abraham, "Give me the persons and take the goods thyself." But Abraham made

reply: "I have lifted up my hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take from a thread even to a shoe-latchet, and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich: save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion."

In all this we have another illustration of the strength of Abraham's faith. It kept him equally removed from ascetic seclusion on the one hand, and worldly conformity on the other. He did not scruple to work with ungodly allies when he was himself clearly in the path of duty. Lot was a prisoner. There was no question in his mind that he should do his utmost to deliver his kinsman; and though he could hope for success in that only by joining himself for the time with the Canaanitish sheiks, and seeming to be on the side of the King of Sodom, yet he did not hesitate to take that course and leave the issue with God. Herein he has left us an example which is not without its significance; for there are movements, some political and some moral, in our city and in our land, in which we can hope to succeed only by accepting the alliance of men with whom in the highest parts of our nature we have no sympathy whatever; and there are many among us who stand aloof because they do not wish to be brought into contact with such characters. What is it but a widespread feeling of this sort which has given the regulation of municipal affairs among us into the hands of men who have in many cases neither the confidence nor the respect of the Christian portion of the community? But for Christians to stand aloof in these circumstances and let things take their course is the merest cowardice. Say not to me

that you are seeking thereby to keep yourselves pure. Do your duty, and leave the consequences to God. Believe me, he will not let you suffer from that which you undertake out of a regard to his glory and the welfare of your fellow-men.

So, again, there are many enterprises of benevolence in which the deliverance of our fellow-men from the misery of disease or poverty cannot be accomplished by us, unless we consent to work with persons of whose characters we cannot in all respects approve. What then? Must we refuse to sit at a benevolent board because Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre are there also? As well might we decline to lend a hand in the extinguishing of a destructive fire, because we saw one of the greatest roughs of the neighborhood holding the hose! No! no! So long as we are in the world we shall have to meet the men of the world; we shall have to work with them, too, in benevolent matters, if at least we would set free the Lots whom tyrannous evils have taken captive; and they who hold back from the fear of contamination are signally deficient in that faith for which Abraham was so remarkable.

But notice, again, that this old patriarch would not allow the presence of the ungodly to keep him from showing honor to God in the person of his priest. When Melchizedek came forth to meet him, Abraham did not treat him with coldness, because he happened at the moment to be in company with the King of Sodom. On the contrary, he showed him special honor, was not ashamed to receive his benediction, and gave him, without asking any one's leave, a tithe of the spoils. Now there was true courage! Abraham was not ashamed of his religion, and, when the occasion offered, he was ready to make it known. He did not hide his flag, but let it flutter openly in the breeze.

And what a lesson is there in all this for us! It is hard enough for many of us to confess Christ in the midst of a company of his friends, and multitudes are altogether ashamed of him in the presence of his enemies. If a stranger happens to be our guest, and we know that he ridicules religion, we omit family worship for that evening. If a friend not remarkable for spirituality calls upon us on the Lord's day, and the time comes for us to go to the sanctuary, we are afraid to say anything about it, and we remain at home with him. If, in our business hours, a brother comes and speaks to us about spiritual things, in a style that might be as refreshing to us as the bread and wine of Melchizedek were to Abraham, we see a smile of contempt on the countenance of our worldly customer, and we plead that we are too much engaged at present to give him any more of our time. And if one waits upon us in the name of Christ, and asks our pecuniary help for his cause, we have no tithes to give him, and too frequently consider him as an intruder. Why is this? Ah, friends! let us be honest and confess it frankly, it is because we do not really believe that our chief business is with God, or that our strongest obligations are to him.

But still farther here, observe how Abraham would not consent to be laid under any debt of any sort whatever to the King of Sodom. He could take refreshment and a blessing from the hand of Melchizedek, but he would receive nothing from Bera. Why this distinction? The only answer we can give is because of the different characters of the two men. With Melchizedek he was safe; but how did he know that Bera would not claim from him some return which he could not conscientiously make? Therefore he would fetter himself with no entanglement. I think it was William

Wilberforce, who, on being requested to use his influence with William Pitt, to obtain an office for some friend, declared that he never had asked, and never would accept, any such favor from any government, because he wished to preserve his independence. His heart was set on securing the emancipation of the slave, and knowing that "a gift blindeth the eyes," he would not receive any office from any one, lest it should weaken the force of his protest against that which he believed to be "the sum of all the villainies." What a lesson for all! Oh for the faith of Abraham that we may learn it well!

III. The last incident from Abraham's life to which I shall call attention to-night, is his purchase of the cave of Machpelah, a transaction which is very graphically described in the twenty-third chapter of Genesis. His beloved Sarah had breathed her last, and he was seeking for a place of burial wherein to lay her remains. Commonly in these circumstances men go back to the old homestead, and lay their dead beside the ashes of their fathers. But had Abraham acted on that principle, and carried the body of Sarah to Ur of the Chaldees, he would have seemed to give up all hold of the promise which assured him that Canaan was to be the possession of his children. He knew how associations twine, year after year, around the God's-acre which contains all that was mortal of our dead, and he wished, in coming days, that such associations for his children should cluster, as they did, around the land of promise. Therefore he determined to bury Sarah in the neighborhood of Hebron; but to have her sepulchre thus, as it were, the first earnest of the great inheritance, it was necessary that it should be acknowledged on all

hands as his own. So he resolved to purchase it, and we have in the history a most charming description of the whole negotiations. Seeking the intercession of his neighbors, the children of Heth, with Ephron the son of Zohar, he made his proposal to the latter with great courtesy, at the gate of the city, and in the audience of all the people. After a fashion still prevalent in the East, Ephron made as if he would give the land to Abraham for nothing, in the hope perhaps of getting more than its value afterwards under the name of a present. But Abraham firmly though kindly declined to take it on any such terms; and then, an agreement having been made for four hundred shekels, he weighed them honestly out, and had the boundaries defined, so that in all after time there might be no dispute.

Now, what I wish to emphasize here is the open, manly honesty of Abraham. There was no cheapening of the price—nothing of "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer: and when he is gone his way, then he boasteth." Here were only civility, courtesy, and integrity. He did everything in a business way, but he had respect for others as well as for himself. He recognized that there was another hearer than the multitudes assembled at the city gate, even God himself, and he did not choose that He should hear anything of rudeness, or selfishness, or dishonesty from his lips. Oh, how much more pleasantly business would be conducted among ourselves if we were to act in this way! But too many of us are constantly on the watch for an advantage! The seller's maxim too frequently is the selfish one of the Romans, "*Caveat emptor*"—let the buyer look out for himself. And the buyer is, on his side, too frequently just as eagerly anxious to overreach the seller. It is far too often

"diamond cut diamond" between them. But that both are bad does not excuse either, and *God is listening to both.* Ah! if we all remembered that, our stores would be different places from what they often are, and business would rise to its ancient and irreproachable renown. Faith in God—such faith as Abraham had—that is still the great necessity of life. For pureness, for integrity, for liberality, for courage, for courtesy, this is what we mainly need. It is as true to-day as when John wrote the words, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

It would be wrong, however, if I were to leave you with the impression that Abraham never acted in any way dishonorably or deceitfully, for on at least two memorable occasions, when he imagined his life to be in danger owing to the beauty of Sarah, he was guilty of falsehood, and the scheme which he concocted might have issued most disastrously had it not been for the interposition of God. So we see that in the best of mere men there is no perfection. But it is more to the purpose to point out that we are in danger often just where we are strongest, for it was in the very faith which was his characteristic grace that Abraham failed. So it will not do for us to imagine that our characters are so surely established in any grace that we may slacken our vigilance regarding it. In Moses, it was meekness; in Job, it was patience; in Elijah, it was courage that failed; and after such examples let no man think himself secure.

Furthermore, let us remember that our faith is in greatest danger when we think that our life is in peril. That was the fear before which Abraham fell. Strangely enough, he does not seem to have had any great concern about Sarah! Indeed, that is so strange as to be wellnigh incomprehensible to me, except

on the ground of the prevalence of loose notions on such matters in those early days in the East. But he feared first that Pharaoh, and afterwards that Abimelech, would slay him for his wife's sake. So the dread of death brought him into this snare. "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life," said Satan. His words are not absolutely true, for he found out that Job would not give his integrity for his life, and the honor-roll of the noble army of martyrs is composed of the names of those who preferred principle and allegiance to God to life. But for the average of men Satan's assertion is not far from the truth, and it is in this way that he, for the most part, seeks to break them down. He makes something appear to be necessary to them as a means of support, and persuades them that if they give it up they will starve. Now let us guard just there! and when he says, "You must live," reply, "No! my life is God's affair, and he will sustain it as long as he needs me on the earth; but my conduct is my affair, and I will not do that sinful thing though I should die." Ah! how many criminals in our States' prisons, how many broken-hearted women who have sold their honor for bread, might have been saved if they had met temptation so!

Every reader of Macaulay's works has had his pulses quickened by the ringing words which he puts into the mouth of an old Roman patriot on a day of danger:

"To every man upon this earth death cometh soon or late;
And how can man die better than in facing fearful odds,
For the ashes of his fathers and the temples of his gods?"

But there is a nobler death even than that. It is the death of him who perishes facing and resisting

evil, not at the stake merely, but in common life, that he may keep his conscience undefiled and his heart true to God. May God help us always by faith in himself to conquer every adversary, and then for us will be the realization of the promise, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me on my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne." Amen.

APPREHENDED THAT I MAY APPRE-HEND.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 12.—"I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."

THESE words belong to one of those autobiographical passages which every reader recognizes as among the most effective portions of the letters of Paul. His allusions to his public discourses or his pastoral habits are mainly interesting to those who are invested with the office of the ministry. His references to his apostleship are especially valuable to the student who desires to know something of the organization of the primitive Church. But such personal utterances as this belong to us all alike. Here is a man of like passions with ourselves. Here is an experience nearly akin to our own. Here is a model, not for the study or the pulpit merely, but for life in whatever circumstances. Here is something that may tell us, not how we may become great Christian preachers, but how we may prosecute our high calling as followers of Jesus, while yet we are caged and conditioned by the lower calling of our business or our domestic duties. Paul the apostle, the preacher, the miracle-worker, the martyr, seems a great way above us and a long way off; but Paul the man, the Christian, is on the same plane with us and very near, and his experience must be helpful to us in every condition of life. Let me, therefore, endeavor, without further preface, to bring out before you some of the important truths

which have been suggested to me by this text, taken in connection with its surroundings.

I. Paul was apprehended by Christ. In simpler phrase, he was laid hold of by Christ. The reference is undeniably to the incidents connected with his conversion, with which every reader of the New Testament is familiar. As he journeyed toward Damascus with one set of ideas and one definite aim, the Lord appeared unto him, and forthwith a thorough shock was given to his opinions, his principles, his ambitions. In that critical moment a light flashed upon him which, though it blinded his outer vision, irradiated his soul within and let him see how poor the life was that he was leading, and how miserable the end was that he was seeking, while, at the same time it opened up before him the vision of an ambition worthier of one who was an heir of immortality. It gave him a glimpse of a loftier ideal than, up to that moment, he had ever dreamed of, and such a glimpse, that his soul was filled with it. He did not so much possess it as he was for the time possessed by it. It laid hold of him and held him. It would not let him go, indeed, until he had definitely and deliberately decided whether he would accept of it or not.

Now what was it that thus, as I may say, arrested Paul? It was the perception—none the less clear that it was the effect of a moment—it was the perception of a noble perfection of moral character as that was actualized before him in the Lord Jesus Christ, and made possible for him through faith in that Divine Redeemer. Up till this time he had been seeking external things—a position in the state, a reputation for punctilious obedience to ritualistic rubrics, a name for zeal for the religion of his fathers; but now,

with the vision of the Christ, there came upon him, sudden and vivid as a flash of lightning, the conviction that, even if he gained all these things, he would still be fatally defective in the highest elements of his being, he would still be without that inner character which consists in likeness to God, and that abiding happiness which springs from communion with God. There and thus, therefore, was he confronted with the great question, "Shall I go on and be content with the hollowness of Phariseeism and its inevitable issue? or shall I go back and build my life anew after the matchless pattern which has just been set before me? Is my ideal still to be that of some famous Rabban, or is it to be the spiritual perfection which I have just seen in Christ?" He could not get away from this until he had given it an answer. He had come to a cross-road, and he must stand still until he had chosen which pathway he would take. He was thus for the moment arrested, or apprehended, by the Lord Jesus.

"But what," you say, "has all this to do with me? Was there not miracle here, and how can there be anything in this that touches me?" Let us see. Have you never been laid hold of by a similar discovery of yourself, and a similar perception of a noble, godlike ideal in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ? There might be nothing of miracle in your case, but has there never been any such arresting or apprehension of you? I make bold to say, that there is not one who has ever come into contact with the gospel of Christ who has not been, at some stage or other of his history, laid hold of thus. Young man, whosoever you are, you have had already an experience of this very kind. As you have been devoting yourself to the idolatry of wealth, or to the pursuit of pleasure, or to the race for position and preferment in the state,

you have been met even as Paul was at Damascus, and laid hold of by the Lord. He has come to you through the faithful preacher, who has exposed the hollowness of all things save character, and has shown you how that can be truly and nobly formed only by union to the Lord Jesus; or he has brought you to a stand-still by the death of some companion or fellow-student, who but a few hours before was as rollicking and careless as yourself; or he has laid his hand on you in sickness and held you to your couch, face to face with the question, "Have I been living a life such as an immortal man should live?" My middle-aged friend, you know about this too. Ah! how the Lord apprehended you and asked you to revise all your theories of life that day when you buried your darling little one out of your sight! Paul did not see more through the vision that came to him by the way, than you did that day through the telescope of your own tear as it dropped upon her bier. Did he not arrest you, too, my hearer, in a similar way, when your business went all wrong, and the enterprise to which you had given all your energies burst like a bubble in an infant's hand? Was there no cry from him to you then, as he held you and would not let you go, "Wherefore do ye spend your labor for that which satisfieth not? Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live." Need I go further in this line? Is there one here today who has not been laid hold of thus? If there be, may Christ arrest him now, as I ask him these questions: "Will the course of life you are living in now do to die in? What if you had already gained all you are seeking? Would you be happier, nobler, or stronger in that which is the essence of your nasure, namely, your character? What does your life

look like in the face of Christ and at the foot of his cross? Could you go again where you went last night, if you knew that Jesus should meet you at the threshold, and say to you, 'Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee'? If you have never been apprehended before, I arrest you now, in the name of the Lord Jesus." Thus saith the Lord: "Consider your ways. Ponder the path of your feet. Stand ye in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."

II. Observe, secondly, that Paul did not refuse to lay hold of that which the Lord Jesus set before him. There is here, therefore, a human agency as well as a divine. The Lord Jesus does not apprehend a man and compel him against his will, and in violation of his free agency, to enter upon another life. That is the notion which many people have of conversion. They suppose that the Holy Spirit is to come like some rushing mighty wind, and whirl them into the kingdom, altogether irrespective of any choice of their own, and, indeed, whether they will or not. So they give themselves no trouble upon the matter. They are "waiting for the Spirit." Now see how false, in the light of Paul's own conversion, all such views are, If ever there was a case in which a man might have been said to have been altogether passive in the crisis of conversion, it was certainly this of the apostle. Yet though he was apprehended by Christ, the great change was not completed until he had himself apprehended that for which Christ had arrested him. The stopping of him in his career, the setting of the truth before him, the giving to him of a vision of the exalted nobleness of life in Christ, all that was done for him.

But he had to choose for himself whether or not he would transfer himself from the service of the world to the service of Christ, and when the cry came out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" the new life had begun. He had entered upon the path which the Redeemer opened up to him. He had set out in the pursuit of that new ideal which Christ had shown him.

But not every one who has been laid hold of by Christ has thus responded to the Lord's appeal. Many have been apprehended who have failed themselves to lay hold of that for which they had been arrested. In this connection can we forget that young ruler before whose eye the Lord Jesus opened up a magnificent prospect of a useful and holy life, to be entered through the gate of self-sacrifice, and who "went away sorrowful," making what the poet Dante has suggestively styled "*the Great Refusal*"? Or can we help thinking of Herod, whose better nature responded to the Baptist's appeal; or of Felix, who shuddered as Paul showed him the fearful abyss on whose giddy edge he was at the moment standing; or of Agrippa, who was "almost persuaded" to lay hold of eternal life? Each of these had Paul's opportunity, but oh, how signally they failed to improve it! They were apprehended, but they did not apprehend! Or, taking a modern instance, who that has read that melancholy autobiography left behind him by John Stuart Mill can help recalling here the description which he has given of that which might have been the religious crisis of his life? These are his words: "I was in a dull state of nerves, such as everybody is occasionally liable to, unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement—one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times becomes insipid or indifferent—the

state, I should think, in which converts to Methodism usually are when smitten by their first 'conviction of sin.' In this frame of mind it occurred to me to put the question directly to myself: 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to could be completely effected at this very instant; would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, '*No.*' At this my heart sank within me; the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm, and how could there ever again be any interest in the means? I seemed to have nothing left to live for." * Thus even to him, nurtured though he had been in atheism, and educated without a religion, the Saviour came, laying on him his arresting hand, and beseeching him to adopt a more stable foundation for his life. But alas! he too made "*the great refusal*," and deliberately put away from him that which would have furnished him with a model that can never lose its relative superiority, no matter how we ourselves may grow, and with a motive that can never lose its power.

But why need I direct your attention thus to others? There are those here now who, though they have been laid hold of by Christ, it may be on more than one occasion, have never yet laid hold of that to which he summoned them. They have seen as plainly as possible the wrongness of their present course, but they have not chosen to give it up for the way of Christ. Why? Because, to do that

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* *Autobiography*, by John Stuart Mill, pp. 133, 134.

would have involved the sacrifice of all that hitherto they have cherished. They were not prepared, like Paul, to "count as loss" those things which were formerly gain to them. They were not ready to part with their worldly pleasures, or even with their besetting sins, for Christ. As Herod was wedded to Herodias, as Felix was devoted in heart to Drusilla and his bribes, as Agrippa was dazzled by the glittering pomp of his own royalty, so they have been married to the world, and they have kept that rather than give it up for Christ. But is not this procedure on your part, my friends (for I must expostulate with you regarding it), the course of folly? What can the world do for you that for its sake you should put away from you the glorious heritage which Jesus promises? Its riches cannot confer happiness; and even though they could, they are delusive, and may perish in a moment, while you can take none of them with you into the world beyond, for "there are no pockets in a shroud." Its pleasures even, as described by one who knew them well, are transient,

> "Like the snow falls in the river,
> A moment white, then melts forever."

Nay, they are like the prophet's roll, sweet in the mouth but bitter in the belly; there is nothing enduring about them but the sting they leave behind them. Its honors are evanescent; its fame is empty. Is it for these things, then, and things like these, that you would barter that glory, a glimpse of which the Christ has given you? But, more than this, perishing as they are, the world's things are unsatisfying. Is it not true of you, too, that even if you were at this moment to obtain all that heretofore you have been living for, you would not be happy, because you would not be able to respect

yourselves, or to feel that, as before God, you had lived for any noble and enduring end? You would have in you nothing of that purity of heart which is needful to the vision of God. Why then persist in such a course? "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

III. I remark, thirdly, that Paul was not content with a mere partial attainment of that which Christ had set before him. Hear his words: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." And again: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended." Yet if any man might have been excused for cherishing feelings of complacency regarding himself, that man was Paul. He had done and suffered much for Christ. He had given up at the time of his conversion what to most might seem the fairest political prospects; and from that moment on he had lived in poverty, in danger, in unwearied labor, and in continuous self-denial. As he looked at the large cities which he had visited, and the flourishing churches which he had founded, he might feel that he had not lived in vain; while his character had developed, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, into a symmetrical unity, which mirrored, more completely than any other man's has ever done, the perfection of the Lord Jesus. Yet he says, "I have not attained." He did not go to sleep over the singularity of his conversion and exclaim, "Because the Lord appeared unto me in the way, therefore I need concern myself no more. I at least am safe." He did not rock himself in the cradle of his apostolic success and say, "Because I have done so much, I need do nothing more." He did not soothe himself with the opiate of his official position

in the church, saying, "Am not I an apostle, why should I give myself uneasiness?" No, ever as he moved on, his eye was fixed on Christ. The more elevated he became in character, the more elevated Christ became to him. Every new attainment which he made opened his eye to something more that was to be attained, and so he followed on, still pursuing the great ambition with which his heart was fired when first he consented to be the Lord's. "I follow after," and again, "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Now there is much here to instruct us; for is not the idea too prevalent among us that religion consists more in the recollection of a certain critical experience, or the taking of a certain ecclesiastical position, than in the daily approximation of the character to that of Christ? One remembers a time when he believed in the Lord Jesus, as the phrase is, and came into church. He has been converted. He has made a profession of religion. Better still, perhaps, he is a Sabbath-school teacher, and there is nothing wrong with his outward life, or perhaps he has succeeded in slaying one evil habit—say intemperance or profane swearing—and so he thinks that all is well, and that he needs not concern himself much more about anything. His religion is a matter settled, shelved, and done with. Now let such an one lay himself alongside of the apostle here, and see how insignificant he looks. In the one case you have a wizened, wilted, dried-up branch; in the other, you have a growing tree, sending out its branches in luxuriant leafiness, and having on its boughs many birds that sing for gladness. It will not do, my hearer, to live upon some

past experience; and if you are complacently stroking yourself down, as one of those who need not be troubled about anything, because you remember that you once believed, then let me tell you that you have had an entirely wrong idea of the purpose for which the Lord laid hold of you at that particular time. You think that he did so merely to save you from punishment for your sins, and, doubtless, that was in his intention too; but the main object he had in view was to stir you up to the formation of a character like his own, and that is a work that will never be finished on earth, if, indeed, it ever will be even in heaven. I would desire, therefore, to shake you out of your complacency, by letting you see how much there is yet between you and your Lord. Tell us less about what is behind. Don't be always recounting the story of your conversion. Forget even, for the time, the occasion of your joining the church. Look forward. Yonder is Christ. See how far you are yet from him. Would it not be better, therefore, for you to let the past alone, and seek nearer conformity to him? That the vessel has been launched is much, but that will not take her across the ocean. No, you must weigh anchor, and get up steam, and set out, and keep on taking your observations day by day, if you mean to do that. Forward, then, my brother, there remaineth very much to be attained! and if you would apprehend it easily, you must keep advancing. You cannot walk swiftly, let alone run, if you are forever looking over your shoulder at that which is behind. "Remember Lot's wife," and take heed lest, as you cast those lingering looks behind you, there come some sweeping storm of judgment that shall make you, too, a basaltic beacon of warning for every after age.

IV. I remark, finally, that Paul was not discouraged because he had not yet fully apprehended. There is here no note of despondency, far less any indication of despair. His words are full of the joyful exhilaration of heart which one feels as he climbs some Alpine height, and pictures to his imagination the glorious panorama that shall open to his gaze when he reaches the summit.

Now there are three elements in this aspiration of the apostle's which I should like to bring out for the encouragement of some among us, whose continual lamentation it is that they cannot actualize in their own characters the perfection which they see before them in Christ. The first is, that the joy of the human soul is inseparably connected with the effort to reach that which is above it. I recall here the story of the artist, who, standing before the latest production of his hands, burst into tears, and on being asked for the reason of his emotion, replied, "Because I am satisfied with my work." He felt he had done all that was in him; that, in a word, he had overtaken his ideal, and so henceforward the joy of his art for him was gone. Perhaps, too, it was something of the same sort that made Alexander weep when he had conquered India. He had filled in the outline of his life which he had made for himself, and thought not that there was yet another world left him where conquest would be far more honorable, even the world within himself. But the Christian is delivered from this danger. He has always the joy of advancement, while yet there is ever something more in Christ beckoning him forward.

Again, in the apostle's aspiration there was to himself the evidence that he had made some progress. It is a helpful saying of one author here, "That which is best in you is your appreciation of that which is

better than you."* Hence your consciousness that you are so far from Christ is, on the other side of it, an evidence that you are also very far removed from that world which formerly crucified him for being what he was, and which still rejects his principles and example. You would not desire to be like Christ, if there were not that in him which attracts you to him, and the fact that you are so drawn to him is itself an assurance of your relationship to him which may well drive away all despondency. The Christian's aspirations after God are inspirations from God, and at the same time prophecies that they shall yet be satisfied in God.

Once more, there is in this aspiration of the apostle the consciousness that he is not striving merely in his own might. He knows that "he has a guide to lead him, and a hand to hold him up." The Lord, who showed him the gate at first, and asked whether he would not choose to enter upon the pathway, will help him all through, and so without any wavering or any misgiving, without one regret for the past or one fear for the future, he presses on for the mark of the prize of the high calling of God in Christ. Nor was he disappointed in his expectations, for even when he lay in the Roman dungeon, and was daily expecting to be led forth to execution, he could thankfully say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me in that day."

But he who helped Paul will help us. Courage, then, my brother. Do not despond though you may be yet far from the goal. Christ will sustain and strengthen you. "You are not called to be equal

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* Lynch's *Sermons for my Curates*, p. 291.

to him," but only to be his disciple, and as such he "will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: he will guide thee with his eye." With his eye—what a beautiful and suggestive phrase! The little toddling infant in its first attempts to walk is steadied by looking into the parent's eye. So let us look to and be steadied by the eye of Christ! and go forward adding one quality of character to another, and rising evermore on the stepping-stone of some vanquished sin. Even if we fail occasionally let us not be discouraged, for he who slips on the steep mountain side is still higher far than the man who is sitting slothful in the valley beneath. Excelsior, then, excelsior! for whoso follows this ambition falls into no icy crevasse, there to lie "lifeless but beautiful"—rather he ascends with safe and steady step until he stands before the throne of the Eternal.

But I may not conclude without one last allusion to the noble resolution of our beloved apostle, "this one thing I do." Throughout his Christian life he had but one personal aim. He unified himself on that. Let us imitate his example, and seek as the great object of our lives the mark of the high calling of God in Christ. There will be no excellence of holiness attained by us without this concentration of purpose and energy. We may learn a lesson here from those who have become great in other pursuits. Look at that resolute student, as beside the midnight lamp he sits elaborating some compact and closely-welded argument. Follow him as he goes at morning dawn and takes his place beside the foaming cataract, or walks out upon the shore. Hear him raise his voice above the roar of the waterfall, or the boom of the breakers, and declaim to the surrounding rocks. Mark how he fills his mouth with pebbles that he may over-

come his stuttering nervousness. You think, perhaps, that he is some crazy fool, but wait a while. See him on the Bema of the great popular assembly. Behold how with that mighty voice, masterly argument, and resistless oratory "he shakes the arsenal, and fulmines over Greece to Macedon and Artaxerxes' throne," and then you must acknowledge that Demosthenes was wise in his generation. Like him, therefore, give yourselves continuously to this one grand aim, nobler by far than that of any orator or poet. Live for one thing, that you may apprehend that for which you have been apprehended of Christ.

But you say, "I cannot be always praying or reading the Scriptures or thinking about religious services." No; I answer. But these are not the things to which I have been inciting you. I have been trying to fire you with enthusiasm for the attainment of Christian character, and *that* you may be always striving after; for every action you perform, every word you speak, every thought you think, you are either manifesting or making character, and you must do that either after Christ's principle, or after that of the world. Which then shall it be? Are you also going to make "*the great refusal?*" Surely no! Up, then, and begin the work. Begin it now, at the cross of Christ, by receiving the forgiveness of your sins through him, and then go on, slaying by the power of his Spirit one evil principle within you after another, overcoming one temptation after another, adding to your faith courage, and to your courage knowledge, and so up and up the golden ladder which Peter has described, until you attain to love. Then you shall be near the summit, from which you will catch your first glimpse of the sapphire throne, for love is perfection, and perfect love is the perfection of perfection.

THE ELEMENT OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS IN CHARACTER.

EXODUS xxxiv. 29.—"Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him."

JUDGES xvi. 20.—"Samson wist not that the Lord was departed from him."

In bringing these two passages thus into conjunction, I have no intention of drawing a formal contrast between two men so different in almost every respect from each other as were Moses and Samson. Neither do I mean to treat of the fact suggested by the mere reading of the words, that beauty and strength come to a man through fellowship with God. My purpose rather is to fix your attention for a time on the one quality of unconsciousness which is predicated of both of these men at an important crisis in the history of each. There was about each of them something of which, at the moment to which the several narratives refer, he was not aware. Now, although in both cases that something was physical, it was in both also the effect on the body of an antecedent spiritual cause. I do not think, therefore, that I shall be guilty of making an unwarrantable use of Scripture, if I employ these verses and the biographies with which they are connected to illustrate some important principles bearing on the growth of the soul, whether it be in good or evil.

My theme, then, is the element of unconsciousness in character, and it is my earnest prayer that God may enable me so to treat it that my words may be full of stimulus to those who are steadily aiming after

holiness, and of warning to those who are giving themselves up to the pleasures of sin.

I. Let us note, in the first place, that this quality of unconsciousness is invariably connected with a peculiar antecedent history. The facts stated regarding Moses and Samson do not stand out in isolation in their biographies. They are in immediate relation to the preceding incidents in their careers. Moses, after forty years' fellowship with God in the desert, had been called, while he was keeping his flocks, to the leadership of the Hebrews, and in that position he had been forty days with Jehovah on the mount, so that his face shone with a radiance which was perhaps as much an emanation from within as it was a reflection of that which had fallen upon him from without. In any case, he had grown so accustomed to the brightness that he had ceased to be conscious of its presence. Samson, again, had been for a considerable time under the influence of Delilah, and, in the deceitfulness of her embrace, he had yielded to her the secret of his strength. While he slept, she stole it from him, and he knew it not.

Now all this corresponds to the effect upon human character of the law of habit. We are so constituted that we acquire a facility in doing that which we have been accustomed to do, so that at length it is done by us without any consciousness of effort, and indeed often without any distinct consciousness of an act of will to do it. How arduous, for example, the process of learning to read! Each letter has to be recognized and remembered, each syllable has to be separately regarded, each word has to be individually marked off and defined; yet, when we have fully mastered the art, we read whole pages without any consciousness

of doing any of these things, all of which must yet have been somehow performed. Or take it in another way. One acquires, suppose, a liking for the use of profane expletives in his speech, thinking thereby to give greater emphasis to his assertions. At first he employs them with an effort, and he brings each oath out with the breathless haste and impetuous energy of one who takes a running leap over some barrier in his path; but at length, when the habit is fully formed, he ceases to be conscious of his blasphemies, and they come forth from his blackened lips as if they were the most common and most innocent expressions. When a man does a thing unconsciously, therefore, it may be taken as an indication that he has formed the habit of doing it.

Now this law of habit operates both in the acquirement of holiness and in the pursuit of sin. In consequence of the inherent tendency to evil which is in us all by nature, indeed, its effect is most commonly seen in the matter of iniquity; but when the soul is regenerated and receives a new nature, the same principle comes in to make our growth in grace more easy. The new man can form good habits, just as the old man formed evil ones, and in proportion as these habits gain strength, the consciousness of effort after the things which they lead us to do begins to diminish in us. Hence as the Christian grows in grace he loses more and more that sense of distinct and careful circumspection in regard to individual actions with which he began his new life. I do not mean, of course, that these actions are less noble than before, for they are even nobler, but they are so without any special care over them on his part. When the child is learning to walk he pays particular attention to every single step, and cautiously balances himself as he moves along;

but when he has fully mastered the process, he thinks no more of the single steps, but only of the places to which and the purposes for which he goes. Similarly in the progress of the Christian life the soul acquires a facility in following Jesus which tends to absorb the consciousness of effort in the higher considerations of general tendency and direction which rise before it. Individual actions are less thought of than the great engrossing purpose of living to the glory of the Lord.

Hence in the details of daily life the character of the believer, as he grows in holiness, shines with a radiance of which he is largely unaware. He knows, indeed, that his one aim is to press "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus;" but that purpose has come so to dominate all his actions, that they are performed as it were unconsciously, or at least they are only thought of by him in their bearing on the attainment of that ambition. Very many of you, I doubt not, will remember a wonderful sermon by Dr. Bushnell on "Unconscious Influence,"* founded on the effect produced on John by Peter's prompt entrance into the sepulchre of Jesus, as thus recorded, "then went in also that other disciple." Peter, however, at that moment was not aware of any difference between him and John. He was thinking only of investigating for himself the marvels of the empty tomb. Now in the same way, in the eager and habitual effort which the Christian makes to attain the great goal that is before him, he loses thought of all besides, and is not aware of the shining light which emanates from his character on those around him. He is not conscious of the difference which the

* In the volume entitled *The New Life*.

prosecution of that great object of his ambition has made between him and others, and he takes little note of the separate stages of his progress toward it. The single steps are forgotten, and only when he passes now and then a mile-stone on his path does he become cognizant of his advancement.

This does not make him a whit less useful to his fellows, but sometimes in moments of depression it may produce unnecessary sadness in his own heart. He does not feel about certain duties as keenly as he once did. There is not the same conscious solicitude about little matters as when he set out in his new career. He has not as much anxiety about details as he once had, and so he is apt to come to the conclusion that "he has left his first love." The real truth, however, is that he has come under the influence of the great law of habit, and that feeling within him, instead of exhaling as a vapor, has become utilized as a motive power. When the machinery is standing still, the steam makes a great noise as it issues from the safety valve; but when the vapor is turned into the cylinder and is used in driving the engine, all that thundering sound disappears. It does not follow, however, that there is no steam. Nay, it is only going in another direction and doing its appropriate work. So when feeling or character is conscious of itself, you may be sure that it is only blowing off; but when it is set to work, it loses that self-display and sends itself into a healthier direction.

The recollection of these principles would, I think, keep many Christians from that morbid depression which comes from rigid self-inspection, and would reconcile us to the fact which must inevitably follow our progress in holiness, namely, that the nearer we attain to that excellence, the less we shall be conscious

of its attainment. The thing has become habitual with us. We have less to resist in following it. There is more within us that inclines toward it. We do not require to make so much effort after it. It begins, as we say, to "go of itself;" or, if we would give it the real explanation, we have received Christ and his Spirit into our hearts, and that being the case, the details of our character, in large measure, regulate themselves in accordance with his principles.

A remarkable verification of this truth is furnished to us by the description which our Lord gives of the awards of judgment. He says to those on his right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;" and he adds, "for I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat;" but they are taken completely by surprise, for they say, "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee?" Now that was no mere mock humility on their part; it was the real truth. The thing done by them, of which he made so much, was done unconsciously. They "wist not," at the moment of their doing it, "that the skin of their faces shone." Why? Because it had become a habit with them to act after that manner, and from that principle, and in course of time they had learned to do the thing without thinking of the principle on which it was performed. A caviller, indeed, might say that it was a farce to reward them for a thing the real value of which they did not know when they were doing it; but when you regard that action, and their unconsciousness of its character while they performed it, as the indication of the settled habit of their lives, the whole case is altered, and the award is vindicated.

So far I have been speaking of this element of unconsciousness as it manifests itself in the cultivation of

holiness; but alas! it has another side, for it comes in also with fearfully dangerous influence in the continued commission of sin. The more one practises iniquity, the greater facility he acquires in committing it, the stronger becomes the tendency to indulge in it, and the weaker ever is his sense of its enormity. Thus it happens that the habitual sinner will, at the end of a long career of wickedness, commit a crime at which the community shudders, while he himself has less consciousness of its guilt than he had of that of the first petty peccadillo which he perpetrated in his boyhood. Men may dwell so long beside the cataract that they lose all consciousness of its unceasing thunder; and as the blacksmith plies his heavy hammer, his hand becomes so hardened by his toil that what would have frayed his skin when he commenced his trade, makes now no perceptible impression. So, by the law of habit, the conscience becomes blunted, and as one goes on in sin, it takes less and less note of his guilt. How sadly and suggestively the prophet of Israel puts this thought in these words, quite in the line of our texts: "Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth it not." As the evil went on, he became increasingly unconscious of its existence, until at length his strength was "utterly devoured," and "he wist not that the Lord had departed from him." I have read of an animal—whether it be fabled or real I cannot tell—called the vampire bat, which, fastening upon the neck of its victim, begins to suck its blood, and as it sucks, its soft wings fan and fan the unfortunate victim, until it sinks into a slumber from which it wakes again never more. Such a vampire is sin. The longer it is indulged in the more thoroughly does it steep the soul in unconsciousness of its slavery. It binds it fast in cords which thicken almost imper-

ceptibly as they are spun, until that which was at first tiny as the spider's most attenuated thread becomes at last like the cable of some mighty ship.

Beware, therefore, of evil habits. Let them not have dominion over you, and to this end resist them in the very beginning. Say not that there is no fear of you, for see you not that such an expression betrays the beginning in you of that very unconsciousness of which I have been speaking, and which gives to habit in an evil direction such an insidious element of power. In a manufacturing town in England, some years ago, it became necessary to do some repairs at the top of one of the tallest smoke-stacks in the principal factory, and an expert was engaged for the purpose. He flew his kite over it, and fixed his tackle so that he could hoist himself up. But when he reached the summit, through some accident, the whole tackling fell, and there he stood without any means of coming down again. Every plan was tried to get a rope to him without success. A great crowd collected at the base of the chimney, and among these was the wife of the unfortunate man. A happy thought struck her, in her earnestness for her husband's safety. She knew that he wore at the moment stockings which her own hands had just knitted. So, at her suggestion, they called him to undo the yarn of which they were composed, and by and by a tiny thread came fluttering down on the breeze. When it reached the earth, they tied to it a piece of twine, which he drew up with the yarn. To the twine again they tied a thicker string, and then to that a cord, and to that again a cable, and so he was saved. That was a work of deliverance. But there is a similar gradation in the cord of evil habit by which a sinner is bound. It is first a brittle yarn, then a tiny twine, with which a child might play,

then a thicker string, and then a cord, and then again a cable, and the poor victim round which all this is coiled is unconscious of the gradation. Sinner! will you think of that before it be too late, and snap the yarn ere yet it has become the cable.

II. But I advance another step in the prosecution of my theme, and remark, in the second place, that this quality of unconsciousness marks the culmination of character either in good or evil. The highest greatness is that which is unconscious of itself. The very forthputting of an effort to be great in any direction indicates that we lack that greatness. How true this is in art, for example, every one who has had an artist among his friends can tell. The greatest achievements made by the sculptor or the painter have been those in which he has been least conscious of their greatness. I do not mean, of course, that the noblest artists have not been the most indefatigable workers. On the contrary, they have labored with persevering effort so long that at last they can produce, almost without the consciousness of exertion, something that will never be forgotten. The subject has come upon them almost as if by inspiration, and without thinking of themselves at all, they have embodied it in the marble or on the canvas. So, too, every one who has had to address large audiences knows that when he is consciously making his greatest efforts, he makes his biggest failures, and that he never really achieves the success of carrying his hearers with him to conviction until he has lost all thought either of effort or excellence, and become absorbed in his subject. In the same way, no musician ever thrills his hearers until he has lost all idea of making a great attempt, and is, as it were, carried away out of himself by

the grandeur or sublimity, the pathos or the gladness of that which he is singing. And never was science so truly ennobled as in the person of him who compared himself to a little child on the shore, picking up here and there a shining pebble, while the great ocean of knowledge lay all unexplored before him. Similarly in the Christian life, which is the grandest of all the arts, we have not yet attained, so long as we are conscious of exertion. If I make an effort to be humble, then very clearly I have not yet reached the perfect humility; for if I had, that grace would sit upon me as unconsciously as do my garments.

You will not imagine, of course, that I speak in this way to discourage you from making such exertions. On the contrary, it is only through continuing to make them that we can reach this culmination of character of which I speak. So long as we are conscious of an effort to be something, we are not fully that something, therefore we ought to redouble our exertions. When a venerable minister was called upon once unexpectedly to preach, he delivered extempore a sermon of great power. It seemed to come perfectly natural to him. There was no appearance of effort; and one hearer, amazed at the character of the discourse, asked, How long did it take you to make that sermon? "Forty years," was the reply. And there was deep philosophy in the answer, for had "the old man eloquent" not given these forty years to diligent study and laborious effort, he could not then have preached so easily. Now, in the same way, our conscious endeavors after the Christian life will, if faithfully prosecuted, lead up to a time when, in some emergency, we shall meet it with the most perfect ease, and be hardly aware of any exertion.

Let this thought stimulate us to perseverance in our great Christian life-work of building character. The longer we labor the less arduous will our labor become, until by and by we shall lose the sense of labor in the joy and liberty of our happy experience. Yet let us take heed, for if there be in us any sense of having attained, these congratulations are not for us. Nay, if that be our condition, we have need of quite different treatment.

What a discount you take off the character which you give to a man, when, after you have said he is this and that and the other thing that is good, you add, "*but he knows it.*" You might as well have taken a sponge and rubbed all out that went before. So if you know your excellence, you have not reached yet the highest nobleness. There remaineth yet the loftiest and the hardest pinnacle of the mountain to be climbed by you, and that is humility. As long as self has any consciousness, Christ has not yet filled every nook and crevice of your hearts, and you have need to learn the lesson which Paul set for the Philippians, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." When self is thoroughly crucified and dead, and Christ liveth fully in us, then we too shall be in the mount with God, and the skin of our faces shall shine when he talks with us.

But note again at the other end of the scale that the deepest degradation is that which is unconscious of its dishonor. Here, too, this "wist not" of my texts is

the climax of the course which the individual has been prosecuting. When a man has lost his feeling of shame, or, worse still, when he is making a glory of that which is in reality a disgrace, he has attained, shall I say, the perfection of wickedness. You see this in the drunkard. He cannot be persuaded to regard himself as in any way an aggravated sinner. He resents all such imputations made upon him. He does not see himself with your eyes, and he cannot understand why those who were once on familiar terms of friendship with him turn their backs upon him now and refuse to receive him in their homes. They are proud, or ungrateful, or treacherous—all the blame is laid on them—but he is as good as ever he was. He is ignorant of his degradation. "He wots not that the Lord has departed from him." So also in the cases of the gambler and the impure man. Their quarrel is with those who cast them out of society, not at all with themselves. They have become too hardened even to despise themselves. They do not know to how low a depth of depravity they have sunk. Hence, however degraded a man may be there is hope of his recovery if he only knows his condition. That is the handle by which yet, through the grace of God, you may raise him, and you will succeed in lifting the fallen from their defilement only by awakening in them that consciousness. Their fall has stunned them into insensibility, and the first thing you have to do with them is to restore them to consciousness. Do not think either, you that are laboring among the vile and the impure, that it is altogether hopeless to bring that about. I have seen the guilty woman of the city brought in a moment from her giddy frivolity to an agony of tears by the question, "Have you no mother?" I have heard one tell that as he stood bareheaded, in the open night,

leaning against a lamp-post in the street, the conviction shot into his soul, "God help me! I am a drunkard!" and painful though it was, that was the beginning of his efforts at reform. It takes a good deal sometimes to bring the sinner to this discovery of his true condition. Samson did not find it out until he was in the hands of the Philistines, and oh! how humiliating it must have been to him to be reduced to be at once mill-grinder and mirth-grinder to his oppressors! The prodigal did not discover it until he had been brought down to the greatest straits and was seeking to satisfy his hunger with the husks that the swine did eat. But in both these cases this awakening, rude and painful as it was, was the greatest blessing that could have come, for it led, in both, to a return to God. And there are few stories in the sacred Scriptures which more forcibly illustrate the mercy of the Lord than does the last chapter in the life of Samson. Vile as he had been, the returning sinner was not cast off, and like the angel at the announcement of his birth, he went up in the flame of his own sacrifice to heaven. Fitly, therefore, may I close this discourse by an appeal founded on that incident, to those who may have had their eyes opened to the dreadful condition to which sin has reduced them. Be thankful, sirs, that your awakening has come on this side the grave. There is yet time for you to repair to God, in Jesus Christ, and he will pardon and restore you. He has raised you out of your unconsciousness that you may have the opportunity to arise and return to him. See that you do not go to sleep again, for if you do you may not awake until you are beyond the possibility of deliverance. Ah me! to be conscious of degradation, and to know that you can never be restored to your true selves! that is hell, and if you would escape that, go at

once to your Father! At whatever sacrifice, return to him, and he will not only receive you to himself, but he will give you back to yourselves; nay, he will raise you higher than you had ever thought of, and by the indwelling of his Spirit in your heart, he will begin heaven for you, even upon the earth. There is no need to despair if you will but act with promptitude, for is it not written, "If from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul"?

WHOLESOME WORDS.

1 TIMOTHY vi. 3.—"Wholesome words, even the words of the Lord Jesus Christ."

THE text belongs to a series of exhortations given by Paul to Timothy for his guidance in the regulation of the intercourse between masters and slaves, and in the treatment of those teachers who should repudiate the principles which the Lord Jesus Christ had laid down in his discourses and illustrated by his example. In the critical and threatening condition of affairs at that time there was danger lest some rash enthusiasts should precipitate a bloody and useless strife between the bond and free by the way in which they proclaimed the liberty of the gospel and enlarged on the equality which is involved in Christian brotherhood. Therefore Paul enjoined Timothy to insist that those who were under the yoke should count their masters worthy of all honor, and that even where the master was a Christian, the believing slave should not despise him because he was a brother, but rather do him service because he was faithful and beloved, a partaker of the benefit. He knew, however, that some who claimed to be teachers would not consent to urge this upon their hearers, and therefore he took occasion to say that pride was the root of their obstinacy, as it was also the cause of their fondness for endless discussions about speculations and words which were utterly unprofitable to all but the hirelings who made their living by indulging in them. This led him to give a general warning against covetousness—that evil

passion which has been the bane of so many alike in the ministry and in business life; and after that he returned to Timothy and addressed to him that solemn charge which must have stirred the soul of the young evangelist to its depths, and which cannot be read now by any earnest pastor without setting him to "great searchings of heart."

In the phrase which I have taken from the chapter over which I have thus hastily glanced, the apostle intimates that there was a standard by which the instructions of a teacher were to be tested. There was, indeed, at that early date in the history of the Church no formulated creed like those with which we are now familiar, but there was a definite theology to which all preachers were expected to conform. This was comprised in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, as these had been orally communicated by the apostles, and have been since collected and preserved in writing by the evangelists. It is true, indeed, that these sayings are not in the shape of abstract propositions, and are as far as possible from being in the form of articles of faith; but yet they hold, as one might say, in solution all the doctrines which are distinctive of the Christian religion. It is also true that they are not so full and apparently systematical in the matter of theology as some of the epistles of the apostles are; yet everything that is insisted on in the epistles may be found in germ in the gospels; and there is nothing in the former which is not either in harmony with or a development of the principles that underlie the latter. If any one wishes to see how these assertions can be made good, let him study three works which I put upon a level in point of ability, and which in a day when men ignorantly sneer at doctrines, are calculated to be pre-eminently use-

ful; namely, *The Theology of Christ*, by Dr. Jos. P. Thompson; *The Theology of the New Testament*, by Van Oosterzee; and *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament*, being the Bampton Lecture for 1864, by Rev. T. H. Bernard. The earnest reader of these treatises will rise from their perusal with a fuller realization than he had before of the comprehensiveness of the Saviour's words, and of the seminal quality by which they are distinguished, and he will be little disposed to join in the clamor which in some quarters is waxing so loud against the proclamation of the doctrines which have usually been regarded as distinctive of the evangelical system.

But I have not chosen this text to-day for the purpose of distilling the theology of Christ from his words. My design rather is, to turn your attention to the meaning of the epithet which Paul has here used to describe them. He has called them "wholesome." Among us that term denotes contributing to health, but here it stands as the equivalent of a Greek word which signifies healthy. The opposite of wholesome in our common speech is that which tends to produce disease; but the opposite of the Greek word, of which this is a translation, is that which is already unsound or diseased. The thought of the apostle is, that there is nothing morbid or unhealthy about the words of Jesus. They have no element in them which indicates that they came from an unsound or diseased spirit. They are the utterances of a pure and absolutely healthy soul, and therefore they have a character unique and distinct. Every mere man is spiritually diseased, and the taint of the spirit may be seen upon his words. But Christ was perfect, and his perfection showed itself in his discourses. Thus there is more in the term than a description of the effects pro-

duced by the words of Jesus. Commonly, indeed, that which comes from a healthy mind is wholesome for all minds; just as the writings of an unsound or morbid intellect are unwholesome to all readers; and so the interpretation we have given to the word may be held as including the idea which we usually associate with wholesomeness; but the other and more comprehensive meaning is too important to be lost sight of, and therefore I have sought to put it distinctly before you. The words of the Lord are healthy, having nothing of the disproportion of monstrosity, or the coloring of disease about them; and therefore they are wholesome, so that all who believe and obey them become thereby stronger, nobler, and sounder in all the qualities of moral manhood.

Now let us see how this statement of Paul may be verified and illustrated. We may take first the matter of creed, and we shall find when we come to investigate, that in this department the words of the Lord Jesus were distinguished by two qualities which mark them as pre-eminently healthy. The first of these is their positive character. The Lord was no mere dealer in negations. He did not seek to destroy, but rather to build up; and all his teachings indicate that he spoke with the conviction of certainty, and with the purpose of establishing others in the truth. Dr. Samuel Johnson complained of Priestley, as a philosopher, that he "unsettled everything and settled nothing;" but no one can read the four gospels without feeling that in meeting Jesus he has come into contact with one who speaks in the most positive manner. On subjects regarding which the wisest minds of antiquity were completely uncertain, he has the fullest assurance. Where they guessed, he affirmed; where

they hoped, he asserted; where they confessed their ignorance, he testified that which he had seen, and spoke that which he knew. Where they unsettled, he established.

In a mere man this positiveness might be reckoned dogmatism, and the constantly recurring "I say unto you" of the Sermon on the Mount might be deemed presumption. But when we take a full rounded view of the speaker, we find that he is more than man, and that by the personal union of Deity to humanity he has come to restore to manhood that certitude about spiritual things which formed one of its original characteristics, but which was dimmed and wellnigh destroyed by sin. When we read his discourses regarding God, we lose all sense of uncertainty as to the divine existence, and have him set before us as the holy and omnipotent one, whose providence extends to all events, and whose eye takes in the secret things of our hearts as well as the open actions of our lives. We may wade through volumes of metaphysics, from those of Aristotle to those of Kant, without getting any distinct notion of God, but "when we hear Jesus say, 'God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,' we feel that God is a personal reality; and though Christ does not define the nature of spirit, yet when he speaks of God as thinking, loving, willing—his father and ours—we understand him better than the philosophers, though he penetrates to the depth of a nature which they had vainly sought to define." * He has settled our minds upon the subject, not by argument, but by awakening in us the God-consciousness which is one of the instincts of our being, and so bringing us to say, "It must be so, for I can rest in that."

* Thompson's *Theology of Christ*, p. 12.

In like manner, when he enforces duty he evokes the conscience within us to a recognition of its responsibility. He recalls to us our sense of obligation, and not on any ground of utility or from any calculations of interest, but simply because "we ought" we are stirred up to obey. He does not reason, but he commands, and in the enforcement of the divine authority he awakes, while at the same time he satisfies, the human conscience, so that it is constrained to say, "This must be right."

So, too, in reference to the future. He does not argue, he asserts with the speech of one who knows whereof he affirms, and forthwith the natural longing of the heart for immortality finds its craving satisfied, and settles in the certainty that "dust thou art, to dust returnest, was not spoken of the soul." Thus, as giving assurance to the mind in regard to such vital matters—as bringing the knowledge of heaven down to meet and satisfy the yearnings of men's hearts for truth upon the earth—the words of the Saviour are pre-eminently healthy. They take the fever-tossing from the spirit, and give it rest. They strengthen, stablish, and settle it.

Akin to this positive characteristic of the Saviour's words concerning creed is the discouragement which they give to all indulgence in speculations about things which are merely curious, and have no bearing upon our character or conduct. Thus, when one of his disciples asked, "Are there few that be saved?" he declined to answer the question, and fixed the attention of his hearers on the vital and urgent matter of individual duty, saying, "Strive ye to enter in at the strait gate." And when Peter wished to know what should be the future of John's earthly history, he replied, "What is that to thee? Follow thou me." He sought to confine the investigations of his disciples within the

limits of the knowable and the practical; and Paul was simply travelling along the line which the Saviour had laid down for him, when here he reprobates all doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, and the like. Everything that is profitless and without bearing on life and godliness he brands as unworthy of consideration or discussion, and all mere logomachies are unsparingly condemned by him.

Now in these two things you have the symptoms of mental and spiritual health. The man who accounts nothing certain, never focuses his mind on anything; while he who runs after every sort of speculation, scatters his mind over everything. The one never gets ready to do anything; the other attempts so much that he really accomplishes nothing. But the sound thinker holds fast by the great certainties which he has verified, and turns them to account by living under their influence. He does "one thing" like Paul, and spends his life in seeking to apprehend that for which he was apprehended of Christ Jesus. His positive convictions give him energy and aggressiveness, and he is effective in the work of his own sanctification and in his efforts for the good of others just in proportion as he holds by the great principles whose truth he has learned from Christ, and keeps himself from disputing about those things concerning which valid conclusions cannot be reached, or if they could, they would be of no practical importance.

Brethren, is it not, precisely, in these two respects that the unhealthiness of much of the thinking in our own age manifests itself? On the one hand, we have those who repudiate the central truths which Christ has taught; and on the other, we have those who follow after all manner of curious and utterly useless

speculations. The one will have it that we can know nothing of God; and the other will spend their strength in discussions that have as little to do with the ordering of our conduct as the debate of the old schoolmen concerning the number of angels that could dance on the point of a needle. And the significant thing about it is, that though both claim to be numbered among advanced thinkers, they really make no progress. For, paradoxical as it may appear, we can go forward in theology only as we hold fast by the certainties that have already been attained. We advance only by keeping what we have, and not by parting with any portion of that which we have received. Men talk of the bondage of creeds, referring therein to the doctrines which have been deduced from the words of Christ. But they forget that some measure of definite and settled certainty is necessary to the attainment of more truth. Who speaks of the bondage of the alphabet? and yet without definiteness in that there could have been no literature. Who speaks of the bondage of the multiplication table? and yet without that there could have been no higher arithmetic, no mathematics, and no astronomy. I do not say that the ground on which the fixedness of these things rests is the same as that which underlies our certainty as to the words of Christ; but still they may well enough illustrate the fact that the definite is the door-way into progress, and not a chain to hold us back from it. It is to advancement what the iron track of the railroad is to the locomotive. It confines, no doubt, but it does so only to increase and render safe the advance, and it were as absurd to complain that the rail hinders the motion of the engine, as it is to affirm that the holding of an ascertained creed in regard to central things impedes advancement in theology. All that it does is

to define the line along which the progress is to be made, and to insure the safety of those who make it. If this were rightly understood among us, there would, I am persuaded, be less disposition to quibble over the things which have been so long surely believed among Christians, while at the same time, the energy wasted in vain speculation would be spent more profitably in seeking to turn that which is believed to account for progress in holiness. One can see, as he comes down the Christian centuries, a clear advance made by the Church in the understanding of the gospel. But it has been made precisely in the way which I have indicated, and nothing can be more unhealthy, or will be more disappointing, than the plan which so many are following to-day, of seeking to advance upon the present by the negation of all that was affirmed in the past.

But now in the second place, passing from the domain of creed to that of character, we are equally struck with the healthiness of the Saviour's words in reference to that. For in dealing with that subject he is careful to put supreme emphasis, not on that which is without, but on that which is within. He withdraws attention from what a man looks like, or what he has, or what he says, to what he is. He distinguishes between the head and the heart, and never confounds intellectual ability with moral greatness. He does not allow reputation to be mistaken for character, and he gives his hearers to understand that one may have a very good report among his fellows while yet he is destitute of that which alone is worthy of the name of goodness. He tells them that "the kingdom of God is within them," that the heart is the great source of good or evil, and that only through that new birth by which the heart is changed can each become what

Barnabas was, a "good man, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith." Thus, just as in opposition to the Sadducees of his day, he set forth the great central certainties of the unseen; so, in antagonism to the Pharisees of his time, he pointed out the superiority of obedience to sacrifice, of reverence to ritualism, of character to appearance. His Sermon on the Mount is from first to last a protest against the externalism of those who placed religion in doing, and an earnest enforcement of the truth that it consists first in being. Nay, his whole discourses in this department are but an expansion of that beatitude which it will take eternity fully to expound, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God!"

Now the healthiness of all this is apparent at a glance, for it goes to the root of the matter, and only One who was himself whole-hearted could thus have prescribed for diseased humanity. But he was not content with prescribing, for by securing the Holy Spirit for us, he has made it possible for any one of us to lay, through faith and obedience, the foundation of that character whose innerness he has so remarkably and repeatedly dwelt upon.

Again, in reference to character the healthiness of the Saviour's words appears in that he insists, not on asceticism in any one particular, but on full-rounded holiness. He does not require the eradication of any one principle of our nature, but rather the consecration of them all. John the Baptist went into the desert, but Jesus came into the Home, to hallow it by lifting it up into fellowship with himself, and so making it the earthly similitude of heaven. John was a Nazarite in the sense of separation, seeking his holiness in isolation; Jesus consecrated common life by carrying his holiness into everything about it. And what he did thus with life

as a whole, he did with human nature itself. Thus take the principle of ambition, and though one might have thought that he would have sought to uproot that, we find that he had respect to our constitution, of which that is a part, and sought its consecration rather than its eradication, saying, "Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." Now, here again we are warned against some of the prevalent errors of our time, which spring from the morbidness of their votaries, for ritualism and asceticism have still their adherents among us, and they are both, as we see, inconsistent with the words of the Lord Jesus. Holiness does not consist either in doing certain things, or in refraining from doing certain other things, but in the rightness of the heart with God, and in the consecration of the life as such to him; not in the performance of a certain round of religious duties, or in the profession of adherence to some visible church, or in the doing of deeds, or in the giving of alms, but in the disposition of the soul; not in withdrawing from the world, but in the preservation of that inner consecration which will keep us from conforming to it, even when we are moving in it; not in the denial or eradication of any natural principle within us, but in the elimination of self from it by our dedication of it to God and the service of humanity; not in the "falsehood of extremes," but in the true health of that all-rounded manliness which through its interpenetration by the Holy Ghost is also the highest godliness, does holiness consist. And if you want to know how you can gain that, then read anew the Saviour's conversation with Nicodemus, and seek through faith in the uplifted Christ that

new birth which is the entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

But looking now, in the third place, to the department of conduct, we have in that another equally striking exemplification of the healthiness of the words of the Lord Jesus. He was very far from giving any countenance to the idea that religion is a thing only of sentiment. He insisted, indeed, as we have seen, on the importance of faith in the great central doctrines; and he was equally emphatic in declaring the innerness of holiness. But he dwelt on both of these only that he might the more effectually reach that conduct which one has called "three-fourths of life." To such an extent was this the case, that he made the life the test of all. You cannot have forgotten these solemn sentences: "Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." Thus, even as the character and quality of the tree are looked to by the husbandman, in order that it may bring forth fruit, so the attention of the man is directed to the heart for the sake of the conduct. And the Saviour gives no countenance whatever to the notion that if a man profess to believe aright, it is of no consequence how he lives, any more than he does to the opposite error, that if a man lives right, it is

no matter how he believes. But he directs pre-eminent attention to the heart, because "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;" because, that is, the heart determines at once the faith and the life. Thus there was nothing of the sentimentalist about the Lord; but he was indeed the most practical, because he was the most wholesome or healthy of instructors, and it would have been well for many in these days who are now suffering the consequences of their crimes if they had remembered, in the time of their church membership, that men cannot gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles; and if they had laid to heart the truth that where there are no fruits, there can be no life.

But another illustration of the healthiness of Christ's words in regard to conduct may be seen in the absence of all minute and specific details. He lays down great principles, leaving it to the conscience of the individual to make the application of these to the incidents and occasions of life as they arise. The words of Christ are not like the directions on a finger-post at a crossing, or the indicators of the cardinal points upon a spire, which are of service only in the places where they are set up; but rather like a pocket compass, which, rightly used and understood, will give a man his bearings anywhere. Thus, in the matter of the regulation of our dealings with our fellow men, he says, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." He does not tell each one what in given circumstances he must do, but he gives the general law, and lets every man find its meaning for each case as it emerges. Now the advantage of that is apparent at a glance, for it strengthens and develops character in all who seek to apply it to their conduct. It

teaches them to walk alone, and though in learning to apply it they may make some mistakes, yet it is on the whole better for them to do that in spite of their mistakes; just as it is better for the child to learn to walk, even if he should occasionally fall in the process. Nothing so educates a man into weakness and helplessness as to be told in every emergency precisely what he must do. That makes for him a moral "go-cart," outside of which he is not able to stand, and the consequence is that he can never be depended upon. If the teacher shows the pupil how to work each individual sum, he will never make him proficient in arithmetic. But he gives him the principle, and lets him work it out in every separate example for himself. So none but weaklings in character are produced under the system of having spiritual advisers for the direction—so it is called—of the conscience. For the man never thinks of exercising his own soul, and goes at length, like a rocket, precisely as he is set. But Christ has not thus dealt with his disciples. He has withdrawn himself from visible contact with them, and allows them, under the guidance of the indwelling Spirit, to apply each for himself the great principles of love, and justice, and self-sacrifice which he has laid down.

The man who is continually asking himself, as to his food, what he shall eat and what he shall drink and what he shall avoid, is either a dyspeptic or a valetudinarian. He is not healthy. And in like manner, he who in the domain of morals is continually inquiring of somebody, may I do this? may I go thither? or must I refrain from that? has never rightly comprehended the healthiness of Christ's words, and is far from having attained the strength which they are calculated to foster. Here is the great law, "Watch and pray, lest

ye enter into temptation." And if you would know how to interpret that, Paul will help you in these precepts: "Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." "He that doubteth is condemned if he eat." "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth." The application of these principles intelligently and prayerfully to all questions of conduct as they arise, will develop manly moral strength within us, and will keep many of us from acting as we are doing now.

Thus have I shown you, as comprehensively as the limits of a single discourse would allow, the healthiness of the Saviour's words in the three departments of creed, character, and conduct, and if anything farther were needed to make good my assertions, it may be found in the history of those individuals and communities who have most heartily received the gospel. Wherever any considerable number of persons have embraced its principles, they have begun to make advancement in everything that is noble, manly, original, and sublime, and the places where its moulding power has been most markedly manifested, have been those which have exerted the greatest influence in the world. The gospel has been the seed-plot of our modern progress; and if the history of the past eighteen centuries has taught one lesson more than another, it is that the prosperity of any community—meaning by that word material as well as intellectual and moral eminence—is in precise proportion to the depth and intensity of its faith in the "wholesome words" of the Lord Jesus Christ.

What shall we then say to these things? If they are as I have represented, then surely we ought to study these words, that we may know their meaning;

to believe them, that we may feel their power, and to act them out, that we may exert their influence on those with whom we come into contact. To this I would incite you this morning. Amid the multitude of books which are eagerly soliciting your attention, I would recall you most earnestly to these gospels. Let them not be overlaid by the ephemeral productions of the hour. But "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them," that you may be able out of your own experience to furnish the right interpretation of these sayings : "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." "It is the Spirit that quickeneth ; the flesh profiteth nothing : the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

PROVIDENCE.

GENESIS l. 20.—"But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive."

WE cannot but admire the conduct of Joseph in this remarkable interview. His brethren, knowing that they had given him but little reason to think well of them, feared that he would, now that Jacob was dead, take means to punish them for their early treachery and cruelty, and so they came to him asking forgiveness at his hands, and making to him that very obeisance the prediction of which had at first provoked their enmity. With true affection for them, and moved to tears by their entreaties, their noble brother at once reassured them, and bade them fear nothing from him, while at the same time he speaks of their conduct in a manner which shows the pervasive piety of his character: "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." He had learned to look at his whole life in the light of God's Providence, and in his resignation to that, he found it easy to forgive them. Here, as it seems to me, is the "open secret" of that marvellous equanimity which is so characteristic of his demeanor, and we can now understand why he was neither overwhelmed by the calamities of his youthful years, nor made giddy by the greatness to which in his latter days he was exalted. At first we wonder that the indulged boy, who had been the favorite of his father, uttered no word of murmuring when he was cast into the pit and sold into foreign

slavery. We are surprised at his firmness before temptation, and his patience in the prison cell. We marvel at the calm equipoise which he preserved in the hour of his sudden elevation to the second position in the Egyptian nation. Neither in his sufferings nor in his glory did he betray emotion. But here is the solution of the whole matter. He traced God's hand in every incident of his history. He accepted the lot which God assigned him. And wherever he was, he had the unfaltering conviction that "God meant it unto good." This was the equalizing and tranquillizing element of his being, so that when adversity befell him he did not sink into despair, and when prosperity came to him he was not puffed up with pride; and if we had the same trust in the wise and loving arrangements of an all-superintending God, we, too, might continue peaceful amid all the changes and surprises of our unsettled and fleeting lives. That I may lead your spirits and my own to this delightful faith, I have selected the Providence of God, as described in these words, for my theme to-day.

I. By the Providence of God I mean that preserving and controlling superintendence which he exercises over all the operations of the physical universe, and all the actions of moral agents; or, as the Shorter Catechism has succinctly expressed it, "His most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all His creatures and all their actions." That there is such a thing is clearly taught in the Word of God, is matter of daily observation, and follows naturally and necessarily from the very fact of creation. That which could be produced alone by the will of the Omnipotent can be maintained and regulated only by the same volition. Hence, unless we are prepared to adopt the

ancient doctrine of the eternity of things as they are, we must accept that of an all-sustaining and all-governing Providence, and must agree with Paul when he says, "Of him, and to him, and through him are all things;" and again, "By him all things consist."

Some, however, have imagined that God simply created the universe, either as it is or in the shape of a primordial germ, and left it to itself to regulate itself or to develop itself. They have thought of God, as Melanchthon expresses it, "as of a ship-builder, who, when he has completed his vessel, launches it and leaves it." Or, to put it into more modern phraseology, they say that "He has placed the world under the government of natural laws." But let us not be imposed upon by words. What do they mean by "natural," and what by "laws"? So far as we have been able to discover, they call that natural which is stated, fixed, and regular in its recurrence. But that does not get rid of God; for, as Bishop Butler * has shrewdly said, "That which is in this sense natural, as much requires and presupposes an intelligent agent to render it so, that is, to effect it continually, or at stated times, as what is called supernatural or miraculous does to effect it for once." Neither do we free ourselves from the constant providential agency of God by speaking learnedly of "laws;" for that term, as thus employed, does not denote forces which act upon material substances and compel them to exhibit certain phenomena, but simply the observed modes in which forces work. The law of gravitation, for example, is not that which makes a stone fall to the earth, but it is a generalized expression of the fact that, according to human observation, stones do fall to the earth in a certain ratio.

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* *Analogy*, Part I., chap. 1.

Laws are thus what Chalmers has called them, "summary expressions of general facts," which themselves require to be explained, and which presuppose the activity of one who has chosen to work in accordance with them. They need themselves to be sustained, and cannot be held as sustaining anything. They are simply the principles, so far as human philosophers have as yet discovered them, on which God has chosen to regulate his creation. They have in them no causative power. That resides only in God, and they are the methods in which, according to human observation, he has chosen to exert it. That which makes a cause a cause—that which is the *nexus*, binding the consequent to its antecedent—is God himself. Hence we cannot contemplate him as at a distance from his creation, or as leaving it to itself; and in getting rid of the superstition which, in its ignorance of God's orderly method of operation, conceived an eclipse to be a special evidence of his displeasure, we must beware of falling into the opposite extreme of hiding God from view behind the abstraction of law.

II. Advancing now another step, it will follow from the reasoning which we have just concluded that the Providence of God is universal, having respect to every atom of creation and every incident of life. There are some, however, who conceive it to be derogatory to the greatness of God that he should interest himself in minute details. They would admit a general superintendence, but deny that it is universal or particular. Now, to this there are two obvious answers. In the first place, it may be effectively replied, that there can be no perfection without the arrangement of details. We speak indeed of "mere matters of de-

tail," but that is owing either to our ignorance or thoughtlessness, for it is in the correct adjustment of these minute particulars that true greatness most thoroughly manifests itself. Often among men the most comprehensive schemes are ruined for want of attention to details, and on the day of battle he is the greatest captain who, having the genius to form a grand plan of attack, has also the patience to arrange for the particular employment of each detachment of troops. In short, greatness everywhere is the result of the combination of vastness of design with minute adjustment of each smallest part, and in the plan of God you have these two in the greatest conceivable degree; for, while the telescope reveals the magnitude of his universe, the microscope unfolds the minuteness of his care. But, in the second place, it may be affirmed that small things are often the hinges on which the most momentous matters turn, and that it is therefore impossible to overrule the greater without taking cognizance also of the less. The chemist well knows that a very small error in one of his ingredients will mar some of his finest experiments; and in the great laboratory of the universe it is indispensable that each minutest matter should be individually cared for. It is the same in human life. The deviation of a railway point from its proper position by but the fractional part of an inch is a very little thing, but it determines whether there shall be an alarming collision or a safe journey. And, in looking back upon his history, every thoughtful man can see in it many situations in which a comparatively small thing, little thought of at the moment, has changed the whole color and complexion of his later life. To human view, the preservation of the Israelites and Egyptians from famine is indeed a great thing, and the manner

in which it was done by Joseph shows that he had the mental grasp and energy of a statesman; but see how many little things had to be adjusted before that noble work came to his hand. Had his brethren not been so far from home as Dothan when he was sent to them by his father, they would probably not have thought of laying hands upon him; and if the Ishmaelites had not been passing just at the time, there would have been neither temptation nor opportunity to sell him into slavery. Then his connection with the house of Potiphar, his imprisonment at the very time when Pharaoh's baker and cup-bearer were put in ward for offending their master, his interpretation of their dreams, and finally the dreams of Pharaoh, which recalled Joseph to the cup-bearer's memory, were all links in the chain that led at length to the saving of much people alive; and had any one of them—ay, even the smallest of them—been wanting, the great result would not have been attained. So, again, no event in the modern history of England has been so fraught with blessing as the landing of William of Orange in Torbay, and yet that depended on the sudden veering of the wind from west to east at the very moment of crisis. A little sooner or a little later, and the whole scheme had failed; but its occurrence when it did carried the new king to success. Nay, take any critical event, either in the history of a nation or the life of an individual, and you will discover that it has depended on the coming together and co-operation of many smaller things, which, humanly speaking, might very easily have been, and indeed almost were, different. Hence there can be no watchful superintendence over those things which are confessedly important unless there be also a care over those which to men seem trivial. The choice, there-

fore, comes to be between no Providence at all and that which is universal, and no man who has intelligently studied his own history, to say nothing of that of his own nation, or of the nations generally, will hesitate long over the question which of these he will adopt.

III. Advancing yet another step, we may observe that this universal Providence is carried on in harmony with, or rather perhaps I ought to say by means of, those modes of operation which we call natural laws. It has been persistently taken for granted by many that a belief in Providence necessarily implies belief in repeated interferences with the regular and fixed order of things. But so far as I have been able to investigate this subject that assertion is unwarranted. We know too little both of the nature of God and the method of his government to authorize us to say that thus it must be, and no otherwise, with him. But there are two alternatives, either of which would deprive the objection which we are now considering of all force. We may, with Dr. Chalmers, affirm that those laws of nature, of which so much is said, tell us actually nothing whatever concerning God's operations, except in so far as these are carried on within the range of human observation. Hence there is nothing unreasonable in concluding that God exercises his providential supervision by acting on the highest link of the chain in the region beyond our observation, while yet there may be no break in the uniformity of those sequences which are before our eyes. Or we may say, with Dr. McCosh, in his admirable treatise on *The Method of the Divine Government*, that God has so adjusted the operations of nature, that through them he can administer his providential

government. No objection to the doctrine of Providence is more popular or has more force in it than that which Pope has put in these incisive lines:

> "Think we, like some weak prince, th' Eternal Cause
> Prone for his favorites to reverse his laws?
> Shall burning Etna, if a sage requires,
> Forget to thunder and recall her fires?
> On air or sea new motions be imprest,
> O blameless Bethel, to relieve thy breast?
> When the loose mountain trembles from on high,
> Shall gravitation cease as you go by?
> Or some old temple, nodding to its fall,
> For Chartres' head reserve the hanging wall?"

Now to this it may be replied that "we expect not the Eternal to change his laws, but it is because they have been so wisely arranged that they do not need to be changed, and have been from the first adjusted so as to accomplish all his purposes. We do not expect Etna to recall her fires when a sage is near, or the air and ocean to acquire new motions to preserve a saint from danger; for if the sage has been contending with laws which he professes to observe, or if the saint has been despising what he should regard as the ordinances of heaven, it may be the will of God that these very things should be the means of destroying him. But should these individuals not be rushing recklessly against the known laws of heaven, or should it be the will of God to preserve them, it will be found that provision has been made for their escape, and that not through the powers of nature disobeying their own laws, but through other powers in nature opportunely acting to stop, or turn aside, or otherwise modify their operation."*

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* *The Method of the Divine Government, Physical and Moral*, by James McCosh, LL.D. 3d edition, pp. 178 and 179.

If you ask me how is this done, I must frankly answer that I cannot explain it, but we have a parallel mystery in the fact that in the realm of morals God's Providence takes cognizance of the actions of free agents without infringing on their liberty. Joseph here says what many others have felt when, referring to his brethren's cruelty, he uses these words, "Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good." And though Assyria was employed by Jehovah as his instrument in punishing Israel, it is affirmed concerning him, "howbeit, he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so, but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few." But perhaps in reference to no incident is this truth asserted in the Bible so emphatically as in the case of the crucifixion of Christ, for you cannot have forgotten that remarkable passage in Peter's pentecostal sermon, "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." If these words have any meaning at all, they assert that all the events connected with the crucifixion of the Lord were overruled by God, and yet that the agents in them were acting voluntarily. I attempt not here to explain how the Providence of God is so carried on as to be a controlling and governing thing, while yet it does not infringe on the moral freedom of man. But that it is so carried on is plainly taught in the Scriptures and confirmed by experience; and I am particular in bringing out the fact that the actions of men, as well as the operations of natural law, are under the control of God, because it is in reference to the moral sphere of Providence that the faith of most of us is weakest. How often, for example, one is tempted to say, when a fellow-man has deliberately, or it may be carelessly

and heartlessly, injured him, "If it had been a visitation of God I could have borne it; but that one whom I have served and loved and honored should have dealt thus with me is beyond endurance." Now of course there is an immense difference between what God does directly and what he simply permits others to do, yet the fact that the actions so permitted by him are wrought into his plan of our lives ought surely to have some importance in our view, and we should seek, like Joseph here, to trace the goodness of his overruling hand, and to forgive those who have injured us; for while man proposes God disposes. We cannot get rid of natural law and man's free-will on the one hand, but neither can we get rid of God's controlling Providence on the other. To give up the one would land us in fatalism, to part with the other would be utter atheism. In the *via media* between the two is Christian faith. Let us, therefore, hold to both, even though we cannot comprehend how they are in harmony, for, as Isaac Taylor has finely said, "This is in fact the great miracle of Providence, that no miracles are needed to accomplish its purposes."

IV. But taking yet another step, we may lay it down as a further principle that God's Providence is carried on for moral and religious ends. This will be at once allowed so far as the sphere of spiritual things is concerned. There are some, however, who are disposed to question that God's physical providence is designed to have any bearing on man's moral character. But that this must be the case will be evident to any one who thinks on man's complex nature. He is possessed of body as well as soul, and through the body the soul is in some secret and inscrutable way

affected. Hence physical things may be made subservient to moral ends. And when we open the Bible we find that this is indeed the case. The primal curse was, "Thou shalt surely die," and in that physical was connected with moral evil. So in God's dealings with Israel we find that physical calamity came as the punishment of their iniquity. Thus, to take but one case out of many, in that wonderful prediction by Moses of the history of the Jewish nation we have these words, "It shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day, that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee. . . . Cursed shall be the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine and the flocks of thy sheep. The Lord shall make the pestilence cleave to thee, until he have consumed thee from off the land, whither thou goest to possess it."* Thus the harvest of the fields and the increase of the flocks and the health of the people are all connected with the character of the nation, and when the threatened evils did come, they came in the ordinary course of nature and without any miracle.

But God's Providence is conducted now on the same principles as it was then, and we must still expect that moral evil will be attended by physical calamity. True, indeed, it may be said that it requires the infallibility of inspiration to point out with unerring accuracy the particular sins which are thus providentially punished, and our Lord himself has specially cautioned us against rashly concluding that the victims of such an accident as the falling of the tower of Siloam were sinners above all others because they suffered such things. But in the

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* Deuteronomy, xxviii. 15, 19.

very moment of his doing that, he used the death of these men as a forecast warning and shadow of the evils which were to come upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem unless they repented, and which actually did come upon them, without any miracle, as a visitation for their accumulated sins. I know that here again it will be asked how God can send such evils as a punishment for iniquity without interfering with the operation of natural laws. But again I refuse to be dragged into a region that lies beyond our ken. I simply answer he did it, as this Book makes clear. "In the universe either nothing is mysterious, or everything is mysterious," and the mystery of the mode must not keep us from acknowledging the reality of the fact. There is a retributive element in the workings of Providence. We see, we cannot but see, that idleness is followed by rags, intemperance by disease, dishonesty by suffering or dishonor, and deceit by cruelty. One cannot take up a newspaper without having that fact sternly confronting him from almost every column; and though the Nemesis may be long in overtaking the guilty, sooner or later the wrong-doer is brought low and men are constrained to say, "Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth." Thus in the universe of God the moral and the physical go hand in hand, and still the law is vindicated in morals, as in the fields of the agriculturist, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

V. But if that be so we are prepared now to put the copestone on the pyramid of our discourse, by saying that the Providence of God contemplates the highest good of those who are on the side of holiness and truth. "All things work together for good to them who love God." "God meant it unto good."

These words, as it seems to me, might fitly be inscribed over the history at once of the individual and the race. No doubt it does seem hard that Joseph, the father's darling, was driven from home and sold into slavery; but he held fast his integrity throughout, and when you see him exalted to Pharaoh's side and becoming the agent in saving a whole nation from famine, you are reconciled, as he was, to the hardships of his early life by the glory and beneficence of his later lot. But if we would have a similar experience, we must maintain a similar character. If we would have Providence on our side, we must take care always to keep on the Lord's side. The sinner that defies God cannot expect anything but destruction from God. He may be sure that sooner or later his sins will find him out. But if he turn from his iniquity, and by living, loving faith, link himself in union to the Lord Jesus, then everything that betides him will in the end work out his highest good. The lessons of his boyhood, the oppressions of his fellow-men, the wrongs inflicted on him by those whom he has trusted, his own errors in judgment, yea, with such cases as that of Peter in my mind, I will even add his own failures in duty, will all be lifted up and utilized; so that in the end he will be a nobler and better and more useful man than otherwise he could have been. Thus in a wondrous way to the penitent God fulfils the promise, "I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten." He who has erred through strong drink has become renowned as the benefactor of the drunkard; and he who has denied his Lord, being converted, has strengthened his brethren.

But if we still reject the Lord, then the Providence which might have been our restoration must be our destruction. And so again, after the wide circuit of

our discussion this morning, we come back to the cross. That is the healing tree which, cast into the Marah of our life-history, will sweeten it and make it a fountain of refreshment. "All things work together for good to them that love God." Observe the condition—"to them that love God"—and remember that if we would love God, the first indispensable thing is, that we accept God's love to us.

But the subject on which I have been discoursing, thus full of warning to the sinner, is fraught with comfort, my Christian brethren, to you. In the ancient city of Chester, which is one of the few links connecting the world of this nineteenth century with the age of the Roman rule in Great Britain, there is an old building, which some of you, perhaps, have seen, having these words engraved on the lintel of the door: "God's Providence is mine inheritance." It is said that when the plague last visited the city, that was the only house which escaped the visitation, and so its inmates sculptured these words upon it as a record of their gratitude. I trust that God's providence was the heritage of many who died, as really as of those who were preserved. But the Christian may always adopt that inscription as his own. God's providence is his inheritance, and is so as much and as really when he is suffering calamity or enduring persecution, as when he is prosperous and honored. Friends, if we could but believe that, how much of the bitterness would be taken out of our trials! There are many here to-day who need just such consolation as the theme of this morning supplies. They are feeling the pressure of the times; they have been disappointed in those whom they had trusted; they are discovering the coldness of that isolation into which poverty, and sometimes also the following of consci-

entious convictions, consigns a man. Still, let them, Joseph-like, hold fast their integrity, and remember "God means it unto good." The ordeal may be severe, but the issue will be glorious. Hold fast by that, and ever, as you are tempted to misjudge the character of God's dealings with you, let these words of his own be your reassurance, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you; thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

As we receive this precious word, shall we not go hence this morning in the spirit of Miss Waring's hymn—

"Father, I know that all my life
Is portioned out by thee,
And the changes that are sure to come
I do not fear to see;
But I ask thee for a present mind
Intent on pleasing thee!"

Get such a mind, and, whatever may be the crosses and crooks in your lot, you will find in the end, that God meant them all unto good, and you will be constrained to say at last, "I would not have had it otherwise."

PROVIDENCE IN THE LIFE OF PAUL.

ACTS xxviii. 14.—And so we went toward Rome.

THESE words are connected with a wonderful chapter of Providence in the history of Paul, and my aim this morning will be to set that clearly before you, with such added applications of its lessons to our modern life as the Holy Spirit may enable me to make.

We have here, then, in the first place, the accomplishment of a long-cherished purpose by the apostle. From an early date in his ministry his heart had been set on visiting the imperial city. Three years before he actually set foot on the mole at Puteoli, when he was writing to the Romans from Corinth, he could say "that he had a great desire these many years to come unto them;" that "oftentimes he had purposed to" visit them, and that the longing of his spirit had expressed itself in habitual prayer that he might have "a prosperous journey unto them;" and when it seemed as if the prospect of attaining his wish was becoming clearer, he spoke of his "now, at length" carrying out his design.

Why was it, we naturally ask, that Paul was so eager to come to Rome? To many the metropolis was merely the seat of government, and they crowded to it for promotion in office, and increase in emolument. Their object was, by bribery, by flattery, by intrigue, by cabal, to gain some lucrative

position in the state. Others went to it as the readiest place for succeeding in their professions. For a lawyer there was no field so inviting as that Forum which had echoed with the eloquence of Cicero; for a poet there was no patronage so promising as that of the city whose salons had first heard the odes of Horace, and the eclogues of Virgil; for a teacher no place offered higher inducements than that which at this very time numbered Seneca among its philosophers, and which sought to train its citizens for the government of the nations. The artist found his most liberal purchasers among its wealthy inhabitants; and the lover of fashion resorted to it as the centre of all social attraction, while the man of pleasure found in it the very paradise of luxurious indulgence. Some there were also, like the runaway Onesimus, who saw their safest hiding-place from the officers of justice in its secret recesses. These all, however, were selfish in their motives. They went to Rome simply and only for their own advantage or enjoyment. Others, again, were there against their wills, detained as hostages for the good behavior of their friends, or held as the spoils of war, in a captivity that was both humiliating and oppressive. While some went to its streets to gratify their curiosity, by looking at its famous buildings, and scanning the faces of its most prominent men.

But Paul was not going for any of these reasons. His ambition was to comfort and strengthen the little company of believers in Christ who had established themselves in the city, and through them and with them to work upon that great centre of influence, so that from it at length might radiate in every direction the word of life. He recognized in Rome the great heart of the world, and he was eager to take that for

Christ. He knew that from the golden mile-stone in its Forum, highways ran in all directions to the utmost borders of the empire. He was aware that the statesmen in its senate were the men who, in the course of years, would be sent out as proconsuls and prætors to guide the affairs of the most distant provinces. He had seen such officials when he was a boy at Tarsus, and he had met the soldiers of one of the Italian legions when he was a student at Jerusalem. At Rome, therefore, he would be in direct communication with those who moulded the destinies of the world. If I may adopt a metaphor from the most recent triumph of science, he would at Rome place himself in telephonic connection with the farthest dependances of the empire, and his words would be carried ultimately to Parthia on the east and Britain on the west. So he desired with all his heart to have an opportunity of preaching the Gospel there. He sought nothing for himself, but he was eager to take the entire world for Christ; and as the nearest way to that, he wished to establish himself in the metropolis.

Nor can we fail to see that all this was in accordance with the plan which, from the very commencement of his labors, he had deliberately followed. He did not waste his strength on places of small importance. Not that he considered one soul as in itself of more value in the sight of God than another. The man who wrought so earnestly for the conversion of a slave who had defrauded his master never can be convicted of anything like that. But, in the economy of work, he deemed it best to give himself to those fields which would most speedily reward his labors, and from which the truth which he proclaimed would command the widest areas. He had but one life to spend for his Master, and he sought to make the most of

that by placing himself in those localities in which he could meet men from the remotest points, and from which the currents of commerce and of travel would carry his doctrines out to the limits of imperial civilization. Therefore we find him at Antioch, at Ephesus, at Thessalonica, and at Corinth; and therefore also he desired to preach the gospel to them who were at Rome.

That we are not wrong in thus interpreting his motives is evident from his words in that letter from which we have already quoted; for thus he speaks of himself: "I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise." He acknowledged that he had received the gospel in trust for his fellow-men, and, that he might redeem that obligation in the most effectual manner, he wished to plant himself at that great centre to which men of every country and clime were constantly repairing, and from which statesmen and soldiers, scholars and merchants, ransomed princes and liberated slaves, were continually returning to the lands with which they were connected. What Jerusalem was to Palestine, during the passover week, that Rome was to all the world, throughout the year; and just as to-day, standing in the office of the Western Union, one may send telegraphic messages east and west and north and south, girdling the globe within a few hours, so in the imperial city, one might send his influence, not so rapidly, but just as really, throughout the entire domain over which the Roman standards waved.

It might be thought, indeed, that no one but a madman could have imagined that his single influence could be felt within a city of such dimensions as Rome, not to speak at all of the empire of which it was the capital. What was Paul in such a place? To outward

seeming, it was very much as if a solitary Chinaman should take up his abode in this city in the hope of converting America and the world to the religion of Confucius. But the apostle had proved the power of the gospel in other places, and it was not because he trusted in himself, but because he had confidence in the truth about Christ, and in the God who had commissioned him to preach it, that he desired to bring it face to face with the most potent forces which the world had ever seen. And now at length his wish is about to be gratified. The one ambition of his life is soon to be gained. And who may attempt to describe his emotions in the prospect? Only they who have labored anxiously for years on some benevolent enterprise, and who have been beat back and repressed by adversaries from without, and weighed down by the burden of hope deferred from within, but still have held on, until at length they are on the very eve of victory, can understand with what a thrill of thankfulness the apostle stepped from the deck of the Alexandrian corn ship on to the pier of Puteoli, and felt that at last his feet had touched the shore of Italy.

Now, leaving out of view the lesson which Paul's plan of labor furnishes to missionaries and evangelists, bidding them as it does devote themselves to the great cities, and leave the converts in them to attend to the wants of the surrounding districts, what a comfort is there in all this to those among us who are eagerly yearning to reach some place of pre-eminent usefulness in the world! I may not say, indeed, that every ambition which we cherish is as sure to be attained by us as this absorbing desire of Paul's heart was at length realized by him. God has nowhere promised us anything of that kind, and if we are solicitous for our own honor or our own advan-

tage, we shall be very likely disappointed. But if our consuming longing is for usefulness, and if, like the apostle, we do not allow the hope of doing great things in the future to keep us from doing what is lying at our hands in the present, I think we may cherish the assurance that in the end God will give us our heart's desire.

In this matter of usefulness the Lord has encouraged us both to expect great things and to attempt great things. He has shown us the little grain of mustard seed springing up into a tree, on whose branches the fowls of the air may build their nests. He has let us see the leaven hid in the meal, working its way out until the mass is leavened. And by his own miracle on the mountain side he has prompted us to bring to him our small loaves and little fishes, that he may multiply them to the feeding of thousands. It may be long, indeed, before we reach the point at which we aim. Years may intervene between the formation of our purpose and its accomplishment, but let us not lose either heart or hope, "but still bear up and steer right onward," and in the end our hearts will be gladdened and God's name will be glorified by our success. As I muse on this subject, I think of Wilberforce and Clarkson laboring on till slavery was doomed. I think of Carey waiting and working until he set his foot on "India's coral strand." I think of the noble Henderson, toiling on through poverty and discouragement for years, until at length he reached Shanghai, and became the very ideal of a medical missionary. I think of John Kitto, the work-house boy, struggling with poverty and deafness, until at last he reached the throne of his peculiar power, and became the prince of biblical illustrators. I think of William Arnot, setting out for the pulpit, from the garden in which he labored as a

journeyman, with but twenty pounds in his pocket, and going steadily on until his influence told mightily for good, not only in the two greatest cities of Scotland, but wherever the English language is vernacular.

Take heart, then, my brother. He who has put the purpose within you, and ripened it until it has become a habitual prayer, has given you thereby the prophecy of success. No matter what may be the Rome on which you have set your desire, if it be but to bless and benefit your fellows and to honor Christ, be sure that for you, too, there will come a day when you will be able to sympathize with Paul and Luke when they say, "So we went toward Rome." Ye who are seeking ardently some needed social or political reform; ye who are looking longingly for some sphere wherein you can do the most that is in you for your generation, by the will of God; ye who are fighting your way through difficulty to the pulpit, that you may know the joy of winning souls to Christ; ye who are working earnestly for the establishment of some institution which is to bless the poor, or succor the fallen, or help the forlorn—take heart, and in the accomplishment of Paul's lifelong purpose behold the assurance of your own ultinate success.

But, in the second place, we have in these words something that reminds us that Paul's purpose was not attained precisely in the way in which at one time he had expected it would be realized. One cannot read his letter to the Romans without feeling that when he wrote its chapters the apostle did not dream of entering the imperial city as a prisoner. His purpose then was to visit the metropolis on his way to Spain; and his design on leaving Corinth was to pass through Macedonia and Achaia, to

go to Jerusalem, saying, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome." It would seem, therefore, that he had then no idea whatever that his movements would be controlled from without, or that, when he went to the city of the seven hills, he should enter it as a prisoner chained to a soldier of the Augustan cohort. But see what lay for him between Corinth and Rome. After landing at Cesarea, he went up to Jerusalem, and, being assailed there by a frantic mob, who falsely accused him of taking Gentiles into the temple, he was rescued from their violence by Claudius Lysias, the chief captain of the garrison in the castle of Antonia. Thence he was sent by night to Cesarea, in order to preserve him from the conspirators, who had bound themselves by an oath that they should neither eat nor drink till they had killed him. At Cesarea he was detained for two long years by Felix, and it was only after he had appealed to the emperor, in the exercise of his right of citizenship, and to protect himself from the injustice of being sent back to Jerusalem, that Festus decided on transferring him to Rome. Nay, even after he had set sail for Italy, he was shipwrecked on the coast of Malta, and compelled to remain three months on that island. Thus one obstacle appeared to be interposed after another, and when he went at last, he went in a situation which, humanly speaking, seemed to render it impossible for him to do anything very effective for the cause to which he had devoted his life.

Now, many among us could tell of similar things in our own histories. We set our hearts on some enterprise of benevolence, or on the attainment of some post of usefulness, and we get it ultimately, but it comes to us accompanied with something else of which we had at first no thought. It comes to us, indeed, but comes

in such a way as, if we were left entirely to ourselves, might sink us into despair. We build our city, but we lay its foundation and set up its gates amid such afflictions as effectually keep us from pride and vain-glory. Take in illustration here such a history of, I might almost say romance, certainly of self-sacrifice as that of William Tyndale. He has determined, if God spare his life, to translate the Scriptures into the vernacular tongue, so that at length the plough-boy may know more about them than the priest, and he sets out with high hope to begin his enterprise. He makes application to the Bishop of London, but no help comes from that quarter, and very soon he discovers that there is no room in all England to translate the Word of God. So he repairs to Hamburg, and from Hamburg to Cologne, and from Cologne to Worms, and from Worms to Antwerp, and from Antwerp he is taken as a prisoner to the Castle of Vilvorde, where at length he was executed as a martyr to the faith for whose diffusion he had labored thus in journeyings and in perils. He attained his object, for the Bible which to-day we read bears in its stately rhythm and antique cadence the stamp of William Tyndale more than that of any other translator. He attained his object—but he got martyrdom along with it. So it has been with many others. So, in our measure, it has been with us, for which of us cannot say that, when his soul's desire has been granted to him, it has been in a way that he little thought of when it first took shape within his heart? The usefulness we sought has come, but it has involved, it may be, the sacrifice of home and country, and all the sweet fellowship of relatives dear to us as our own souls. The enterprise we planned has been at length carried through, but it has cost us hardships almost as great as those through which Paul was

brought, and humiliation almost as bitter as the imprisonment to which he was subjected.

Now, we naturally ask why it is that the accomplishment of our purposes is thus attended with such painful accompaniments? Why is our success won through such conflicts, and why, when it comes, does it bring something else with it, on which we had not calculated? The answer is obvious. It lies, indeed, on the very surface of this history. It is to keep us all through our efforts at the feet of Jesus, and to impel us, from first to last, to depend entirely upon him. Had the apostle gained his object too easily, he might have been tempted to forget that it is "not by might, nor by power," but by God's spirit, that all true success in his cause is to be won. Had he entered Rome in other circumstances, heralded with trumpets and surrounded by troops of influential friends, he might have been inclined to trust in them rather than in God; and so, for the very purpose of preserving the real source of his power—namely, his faith in God—he was put into a position in which it was well nigh impossible for him to have faith in any one else.

To this consideration, also, must be added the fact that all through his difficulties and trials God had been near him, and that at each special crisis in his conflict the Lord had shown him special favor. We cannot forget how he was strengthened by the vision in Jerusalem and by the reassuring words of the angel in the ship. So that while, on the one hand, he was kept from self-confidence by his imprisonment, on the other he was encouraged to still stronger confidence in his Master by these tokens of his favor.

Now, it is quite similar with ourselves. In order that we may be able fully to use our long-coveted opportunity when it comes, God gives it to us in such

a way as to humble ourselves in our own estimation, and at the same time to increase our trust in his wisdom, love, and care. You see, then, the practical outcome of all this. If we are striving after some sphere in which we desire to do special service for the Lord, let us not be discouraged by difficulties. These are there to be surmounted, and they can be surmounted only by earnest prayer to God and constant devotion to his glory. Self is ever our greatest hindrance to usefulness, and these trials, rightly improved, will empty us of ourselves, while the constant experience of God's grace will fill us with that trust in him which is the great element of spiritual power. You know how true all this is in our prosecution of holiness, and how God answers our prayer for that very often "by terrible things in righteousness," so that we can quite understand John Newton when, after he had asked the Lord that he might grow in grace, he thus describes the way in which the blessing came:

> "with his own hand he seemed
> Intent to aggravate my woe,
> Crossed all the fair designs I schemed,
> Blasted my gourds, and laid me low."

But the same is true, also, in the case of usefulness. It is through these things that God fits us for doing most effectual service, when we come to our proper spheres, and so far from murmuring over them, we should take them just as the student takes the hardships of his curriculum, on the way to his profession. We should seek to make the most of them for after efficiency. Moses was a far better leader after his long sojourn in the wilderness than he would have been if he had never left Egypt till the night of the Exodus, and Paul was all the better fitted for writing the Epis-

tles of the imprisonment by the trials through which he had to pass before he could enter the imperial city. Take your trials, then, you who are longing for your desired opportunity, not as discouragements, but as preparatives. Carry them to God in prayer, and he will transmute them for you into the very instruments of your after power. They are, rightly improved, the forerunners of success, and not the foes of it. And when you come to your sphere, and find yourself, like Paul, bound by some chain of hampering limitation, do not be cast down. That, also, is a part of the divine plan regarding you, and its purpose is to throw you back more fully upon his sufficiency. Think not that your opportunity is worth nothing because you come to it as a prisoner. Do not imagine that you can make nothing of it because you are under some sort of restraint. The restraint is itself a part of your opportunity, and if you use it rightly, God will make that also subservient to your usefulness. It is better to enter Rome as a prisoner than not to enter it at all, and, if you only set yourself to make the best of your circumstances, God will make even your bonds into a means of accomplishing that on which your heart is set.

For now I ask you to observe, in the last place, that, while Paul's entrance into Rome was not quite what he at one time expected it would be, yet it really accomplished all he desired. Hear what he says in his letter from the metropolis not two years after this very time to his friends at Philippi: "I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace [rather among the prætorian guard], and in all other places, and many of the

brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear." So you see that, though he might be disappointed because he entered the city as a prisoner, he yet had fulfilled to him the presage of his heart as expressed in his letter to the Romans: "I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

The Jews, indeed, as we see from the concluding paragraph of Luke's history, would not receive the truth at his lips; but he found a rich harvest among the Gentiles, and especially among the soldiers with whom he was brought so constantly into contact. He had not the great opportunity which he enjoyed at Athens, where he met the philosophers on Mars Hill. He had not even the advantage which was given him at Ephesus, where he was permitted to dispute daily in the school of Tyrannus. No public hall was opened for his convenience. No huge hippodrome was converted into a tabernacle that crowds might have the pleasure of listening to his words.

But, because he could not do these things, Paul did not commit the mistake of doing nothing. He used his opportunity, such as it was, to the full, and the result was a widening of his influence, so that it touched the limits of the empire, and has come down through all the centuries to this hour. He knew that the men of the Legion, from which came his keepers, might any day receive orders which would send them away to Parthia, or Germany, or even to Britain, and the thought seized him that he might use them as missionaries to carry the gospel wherever they went. So, as one by one they came, to be chained to him for six hours at a time, and as some of them came thus many times over, he spoke to them that "new story" of Jesus

and his love, which has lost none of its attractions to us, now that it has become "the old, old story," and which then must have fallen with amazing power into their hearts. They heard, they spoke of it to each other and to their comrades, they believed, they told it to their officers, and soon there were saints in Cæsar's household, under the very roof of the inhuman Nero.

Nor must we forget that it was during these two years of imprisonment that our apostle dictated to his amanuensis those letters to the Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon, which have been such potent influences in the Christian Church from that time until the present. Talk of it as a privation that Paul could not address a multitude at once in Rome, in some one of the spacious places, what temple, what hippodrome, what forum, even, could contain the myriads to whom Paul has preached in these noble letters? And who may attempt to reckon up the millions who will yet read them in future ages, when the discourses of to-day, which are spoken of as so powerful, shall have passed into oblivion? Yes, it is true, prisoner as he was, Paul "went to Rome in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ."

Oh, brethren, what a lesson of instruction and encouragement there is in all this for you and me! God is answering our prayers most, full often, when we think that he is blighting our fairest prospects, and if we will but make the most of the sphere which is within the limits of our chain, we may find at last that our influence for good has gone round the globe with blessing. The minister is chained to his pulpit, and when he reads a story like this of Paul, or like that of Luther, and sees how one man has been able ultimately to win an empire, or to revolutionize half a continent for Christ, he is apt to say, "Alas! I am but

a poor prisoner here, it is little of that sort I can do for the Master;" but there are in his congregation, perhaps almost by accident, a youth who is going to the far West to begin life for himself; a man of business, just about to start for some heathen city; and haply, too, a missionary, with heart bowed and burdened with the weight of his work in the far East; and some word of his falls into each of their souls, and they go forth under the influence of its inspiration, each determined to take a new stand for the Lord; and by and by a Young Men's Association springs up in the Western city, and a demand for Bibles comes from the heathen centre, and tidings of a revival of religion are wafted home from the mission station in the Orient; and where now is the imprisonment? of how little consequence is now the chain? We do not know, and it is well for us that we do not know, how far reaching are our words. If we knew always, pride would soon take the place of humility, and that would unfit us for our work. So God keeps us down to keep us useful, and turns our chain into an electric cable, along which he sends through us messages of stimulus and encouragement, that pass beneath and beyond the seas. Let no one, therefore, undervalue his position, but use it, *bonds and all*, for Christ, and so our meditation on this rich chapter of Providence this morning will not be wholly in vain.

You know the touching lyric of Longfellow which he has called "The Arrow and the Song." It is so familiar that it looks like an affectation to quote it, but I must indulge myself once more by repeating its sweet lines:

> "I shot an arrow in the air;
> It fell to earth, I knew not where;
> For so swiftly it flew, the sight
> Could not follow it in its flight.

"I breathed a song into the air ;
It fell to earth, I knew not where ;
For who has sight so keen and strong
That it can follow the flight of song ?

"Long, long afterward, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke ;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend."

That is exquisite. But you observe that both the arrow and the song were found just as they had been sent out. The poet has not told, and no poet can fully tell of the impulses that are given, the changes that are wrought, and the work of self-sacrifice and devotion that is suggested, by a fitting word dropped at the right moment into a human soul; and among the many pleasant surprises that are in store for us in the upper world will be the discovery that efforts put forth by us, and which we supposed to be so feeble as to be well-nigh worthless, have been, under God, the germs from which rich harvests of good have resulted to multitudes whom we have never seen. Let us, then, go back to our homes to-day with new views of our condition. Let the struggling among us struggle on, with faith and prayer, for we shall either reach Rome or something better; and let those of us who have gained our wish, but with an appendix to it that seems almost to retract the gift, take heart again, and we shall find our very limitation an intensification of our power, for our Master never mocks us when he answers our requests.

TRANSIENT IMPRESSIONS.

HOSEA vi. 4.—"Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

IN all tropical countries water has become the recognized symbol of that which is most valuable, and the absence of it is employed, in common speech, as an emblem of terrible calamity. The appearance of a cloud in any time of drought evokes the highest expectation, and its disappearance without emitting the scantiest shower causes the bitterest disappointment. Now, as the Bible is an Oriental book, written under God's inspiration by men who had often witnessed these natural phenomena, and felt the emotions which they produced, we are not surprised to find in it repeated illustrations drawn from these experiences. Thus when Jude would describe in the most expressive manner the men whose Christianity was a form and nothing else, he calls them "clouds without water," and Peter, characterizing the same class, declares that they are "wells without water." Thus, also, in the verse before us, in view of the fact that Ephraim and Judah had often given indications of amendment, while after all they continued as bad as ever, Jehovah says, "Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." They had again and again given ground to expect that they were just about to return to God, but alas! the cloud which seemed to promise an abundance of rain passed away, and left only a more oppressive sultriness than before.

The theme thus brought before us is the frequently transient character of religious impressions. I suppose that, even among the unconverted in my audience, there is not one who has not at some time or other in his history been profoundly moved regarding spiritual things. The hearing of some especially solemn sermon, the experience of a narrow escape from sudden death, the coming, for the first time, of death into the household, the suffering of some severe illness, the conversion of some intimate friend and former associate in sin, may have roused him to serious attention to the concerns of his soul, and those interested in his welfare may have begun to hope that his conversion was at hand; but the decided step was not taken, and he is as yet unsaved—nay, perhaps more hardened in his unbelief than ever. Now, it is an interesting and important question, how this too common disappearance of such hopeful impressions is to be accounted for. I am aware, indeed, that the grand reason is that the heart has never been truly reached; but that is itself an effect which has been produced by other causes, the investigation of which cannot fail to be most profitable, and it is especially to this department of inquiry that I would now turn your attention. For my present purpose we may classify those causes which tend to make religious impressions evanescent under three heads:

I. There are, first, those which are speculative in their nature. It has often occurred that when the conscience is awakened the soul takes refuge in the perplexing difficulties, which revelation leaves unsolved, connected with such subjects as these, namely: the harmony of prayer with the foreknowledge of God, the consistency of special grace with the free

offer of salvation to every hearer of the gospel, the origin of evil, the doctrine of the atonement, the doctrine of election, and the like; and because no satisfactory solution of these is found, the individual is content to be as he was before, and his half-formed resolutions vanish.

Now here let it be understood that I do not deny the existence of the difficulties. They are such as environ every man who thinks, and sometimes the more thoughtful the man is, the force of the difficulties is the more acutely felt.

Let it be noted, again, that I am not prepared with a solution of them which shall be free from objection.

But there are certain things which must be said as exposing the folly of allowing even such difficulties to keep us from religious decision.

Observe, then, in the first place, that the existence of difficulties is inseparable from any revelation which is short of infinite. All perplexities arise from imperfect knowledge. If we could know everything perfectly, there would be no difficulty, but the only intellect which has such knowledge is that of God himself. Hence, unless God impart all his own knowledge to us, there must be mystery left somewhere. But it is impossible to compress the infinite into the finite, and so it is in the very nature of things impossible for God to give a revelation to men which shall not contain in it the elements of difficulty. In giving the Bible to men, therefore, it was not, if I may so express it, a question with God whether there should be mystery in it or not; but all that he had to consider was at what limit he should stay, and, as it appears to me, that limit has been fixed by what is sufficient to regulate man's conduct on earth, and bring him back to the favor and fellowship of the Most High. From

the very fact that man is a creature, and cannot comprehend the Infinite Creator, there must be mysteries left in any communication made by God to him, and these mysteries have in them the germs of difficulty, if at least we will not accept them as they stand on God's word, but insist upon prying into them for a solution of our own.

Further, it must be borne in mind that these difficulties in revelation are of the very same sort, so far at least as they touch our conduct, as those which we meet in God's daily providence. What greater inconsistency, for example, is there in praying to God for that which he already foreknows, or, if you choose, has foreordained, than there is in making a request to a fellow-man? God has as certainly foreknown what the result shall be in the one case as he has in the other; but if I do not allow the difficulty in the one case to keep me from asking a favor from a fellow-man, why should I permit it, in the other, to keep me from asking a blessing from the Lord? Then, as to the doctrine of election: what is that but the assertion, in the kingdom of grace, of that which we call special providence in the kingdom of nature? We see one child born heir to a fortune, and another the victim of the deepest poverty and its attendant evils. When I look back upon my own history, I see all along the clearest indications that, while I was not conscious of it at the time, God was hedging me in toward the place in which I now stand; yet, if I did not allow his overruling providence to fetter me in the settlement of my earthly affairs, why should I allow the doctrine of his special grace to be a stumbling-block to me in spiritual matters? I cannot tell precisely what light is, yet that does not keep me from taking advantage of it; and so, though I may not be able

to comprehend fully the doctrine of the atonement, why should I let that prevent me from taking advantage of the blessings which Christ has secured for me by his death? Thus, if we would but bring our common sense to bear upon religious things, as we do on the secular matters of our daily lives, we would not permit mere speculative difficulties to blind us to the best interests of our souls.

Still, again, we must keep hold of this principle, that difficulties in regard to things of which we are in doubt ought not to prevent us from performing duties that are perfectly plain. Whatever a man may be perplexed about, he knows full well that it is wrong to commit sin. There is a conscience within him which witnesses to the obligation that underlies the moral law. He is constrained to admit at least this much, that it is always wrong to do wrong. Let him therefore act out that, and look for further light. Let him give up his evil habits, and do those things which he knows to be right. Let him give over speculating about things of doubtful disputation, and set himself to the performance of plain duties. Perhaps there is one here this evening whose case just needs this counsel. My friend, here is a word of promise to you, and if you follow its advice, your impressions, otherwise evanescent, will stiffen into principles: "If any man be willing to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." The sure way to get more light is to make the best possible use of the light which you already enjoy. Therefore bring up your life to the level of your convictions, and by and by you will find that your convictions themselves have considerably advanced. Do not wait to have mysteries solved before you do that which is your present duty, and whenever you feel disposed to ask some curious

question before you begin to perform some patent duty, think you hear the Saviour saying to you, as to Peter, "What is that to thee? follow thou me."

But some one may say, "In dealing with speculative difficulties that tend to banish serious impressions, you have confined yourself only to the metaphysical. Now my perplexity is of an entirely different kind. I am bewildered with the questions which have been raised by modern discoveries. I read the pages of our physical philosophers. I do not see how their contents can be in harmony with the Word of God, and I am brought to a stand-still." Now here again I do not deny the difficulty; neither am I prepared with a solution that will be in all points satisfactory. But I crave leave to set before you a principle which may keep you from being guilty of the folly of casting aside the gospel because of any such perplexity. It is this, that truth already ascertained on its own appropriate evidence is not the less true because there are added to it some important truths in other departments of human inquiry. When I build a new wing to my dwelling, I do not thereby lose all the advantage of my original mansion. Nay, rather I only add so much the more to its capacity and accommodation. Now similarly, when science builds its annex to the temple of revelation, it does not thereby deprive us of the venerable fane which we have so long enjoyed. We welcome truth from all quarters, for truth is near of kin to him who sits upon the eternal throne. And though we do not see how one set of truths in one department fits into another set in another, that is no reason why we should part with either. Take this doctrine of development, of which so much is said in these days. Suppose it to be true. I do not grant that it is yet established—but suppose it

to be true, what then? Does it prove that the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is not a fact? What does it matter to me though my ancestor, millions upon millions of ages ago, was an ape? That was a great deal more the affair of my remote progenitor than it is mine! But if Jesus Christ rose again from the dead, there is an eternity before me, and it is of infinite concern to me now to know what I shall develop into millions of ages hence. Now that he did rise from the dead is about the best-attested fact in human history. It is more fully authenticated than anything which was announced yesterday in the morning papers; and where is the science that can obliterate a fact? No theories of men, no discoveries of philosophers can destroy a fact. The perception of a new planet by some modern astronomer does not blot the old ones out of the firmament, and nothing that men of science may bring to light can erase the resurrection of Christ from the page of human history. The very corner-stone of the inductive philosophy is this, that there is no gainsaying a fact. And so whatever additions scientific men may make to our knowledge, there remains yet undestroyed and indestructible this great sign that God has given us, that Jesus died and rose again from the dead. Now that fact carries the whole gospel with it. Therefore whatever perplexities modern physical philosophy may raise, there is nothing in them that ought to be allowed for one moment to keep us from "seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." We stand here upon a Rock that cannot be shaken, and with our feet firmly fixed thereon we can welcome, without any trepidation, all the treasures of the most recent discovery. Let this thought, my distracted friend, sink deeply into your mind, and

then your religious impressions, so far from being erased, will be deepened and strengthened by hearing what our physical philosophers have to say concerning other departments of the one divine administration.

II. But a second class of causes which operate in the way of removing spiritual impressions may be styled the practical. Thus some are prevented from yielding to the promptings of their better nature and the strivings of God's spirit with them, through the fear of the opposition which they would have to encounter in so doing. They will be taunted about it by their friends, or they will be made the butt of some disagreeable practical jokes by their fellow workmen, or they will be deprived of some worldly honor or emolument to which otherwise they would have risen, and so they stifle their convictions and become more hardened than before. Now I have no wish to underrate this annoyance, or to taunt those who feel it with cowardice. Few things are so hard to bear as ridicule, and it is then hardest of all to bear when your heart is distressed about spiritual concerns, and you feel such a restraint upon you as prevents you from replying with some smart repartee, as otherwise you could and would do. The thought of having this continually to face becomes to some sensitive spirits positively terrible. But if they would look at the matter all round they would speedily see that their terrors are immensely exaggerated. It only needs that they meet their assailants with firm, unyielding fortitude, and very soon their assaults will cease. When Ruth determined so nobly to accompany her mother-in-law, it is written of Naomi that "when she saw she was steadfastly minded she left off speaking unto her." Now so it will be with those who attack you for your

allegiance to Christ. So soon as they understand that you have determined unalterably to be his, they will let you alone. Nay, they will begin to treat you with respect.

A little more than six years ago, a friend who is deeply interested in work for Christ among our sailors told me that at the close of a prayer-meeting of which he had been the leader, a young seaman, who had only a few nights before been converted, came up to him, and laying a blank card before him requested him to write a few words upon it, because, as he said, "You will do it more plainly than I can." "What must I write?" said my friend. "Write these words, sir: 'I love Jesus, do you?'" After he had written them, my friend said, "Now you must tell me what you are going to do with the card." He replied, "I am going to sea to-morrow, and I am afraid if I do not take a stand at once I may begin to be ashamed of my religion, and let myself be laughed out of it altogether. Now as soon as I go on board I shall walk straight to my bunk and nail up this card upon it, that every one may know that I am a Christian, and may give up all hope of making me either ashamed or afraid of adhering to the Lord."

The young sailor was right. A bold front is often more than half the battle, and many a general has saved himself from being attacked by making what is called "a show of force." So let it be with you in the carrying out of your religious convictions. Meet your assailants, not with retaliation, but with calm fortitude. Give them to understand that you have weighed the matter thoroughly, and that as you are responsible for your own soul you mean to do what you believe to be right, no matter what they may say or do. Tell those of your own household that you are determined to be

as good a son and brother as ever, nay, rather a better than before; but that in this infinitely momentous concern you know no father but God, and no brother but Jesus Christ. Say to your fellow-workmen that you intend to be as faithful in your employment, and as ready to oblige them as ever, but that you cannot sin against God to show your good will to them. Do this with the calm earnestness of one who has looked into eternity; do it with the holy boldness of one who hears his Saviour saying, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." Do it with the self-sacrifice of one who has gazed on the cross of Christ until the love of the Lord has constrained him, whatever it may cost, to live to him. Do it thus, and your adversaries will cease to torment you. Nay, haply some even of them may be won by your honest courage to put themselves by your side. When the vessel is pursued by some suspicious craft, the captain runs up to the mast-head the flag of our nation, and the would-be assailant steers away in another direction, for he knows that whoso fires upon that ship outrages the patriotism of the people and provokes their power. So when men turn on you, hoist your flag, and see in that at once the symbol of your decision and the pledge of your protection; for while you are beneath that flag, he who attacks you touches the apple of the Saviour's eye.

But, as another practical cause of the effacement of good impressions, I name the influence of evil associates. It has often happened that serious thoughts which have been produced by listening to the preacher on the Sabbath have been destroyed by the allurements of sinful companions on the Monday. Many a time in the course of my ministry I have witnessed that. I have looked with hope upon a youth

whom I have seen deeply convinced of sin, and I have conversed with him as best I could with the view of leading him to Christ. Then the next time I saw him he was the centre of a group of those who were making a mock at godliness and running riot in iniquity. Very bitter was the disappointment of my fondest anticipations. Now if there be those here who have been formerly hindered from this cause, or whose present convictions are in danger of being lost in this way, then let me say to them with all the earnestness and affection of my heart that they should abandon at once and forever the society of such associates. If you mean impressions to remain, you must act upon them at once, for unless you do that, you may harden your hearts into utter impenetrability.

It is a law of our nature that impressions which produce no practical result pass away and leave the soul less sensitive than it was before they were felt; while if we act upon a conviction we deepen it into permanence. Thus the benevolence which spends itself in tears over the sentimental novel grows thereby only weaker and weaker, while that which works itself off in active beneficence becomes stronger and stronger. In like manner, the impressions of religious truth which go no further than making us weep or tremble will speedily be effaced, and there will come a time when it will be impossible to have them renewed. But those which are promptly acted out are deepened and stiffened into perpetuity. Now the first thing which your convictions call upon you to do is to break at once with your evil associates. That for you is the crisis of your conversion. That for you is the key to the entire position. Over that your whole battle for the present has to be fought, and your future character and condition depend on your victory or

defeat. It mattered everything with Christian, in the immortal allegory, whether he got out of the Slough of Despond on the side nearest the City of Destruction or on that nearest to the wicket gate. And it matters everything with you on which side you come out of this conflict. This is the first step which costs and conquers; and if you decide aright here, you have fairly turned your faces to the Lord Jesus.

I have known youths so earnest in this matter that they have actually removed to another city or emigrated to another land, just that they might break away from the entangling alliance of those wicked companions who had almost proved their ruin. And if there is no other way open for you, then imitate their example. In any case, have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. What concord hath Christ with Belial? You must make your decision. You must either part with them or give up Christ and his salvation. Which will you forego? Remember that if you part with Christ, you are parting with your best friend and setting out on the broad road to endless ruin. Let me implore you, therefore, not to think of leaving him. Nay, rather break away, in God's name and with God's help, from the spell of your evil associates, and say of the whole race of the ungodly, "My soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united!"

Another practical cause which prevents religious impressions from issuing in permanent improvement is the fettering influence of some pernicious habit. Often have I seen a man, Felix-like, trembling under the faithful presentation of God's truth concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come; yet he went no further, because he never seriously set himself to do battle with his besetting sin. He never

seemed to reason thus: "If I persist in this habit my religious convictions are belied, and my enjoyment of the means of grace will become a curse rather than a blessing." Nay, there was no reasoning in the case; but, at the sight of strong drink, or before the allurements of the temptress, everything else was forgotten, and he went back like the dog to his vomit or the sow to her wallowing in the mire. Alas! how many are there of this class whose lives are continuous vibrations between the emotional excitement of the Sabbath and the sinful excesses of the week!

Now here again the principle on which I have just been insisting comes in with the most solemn warning. A feeling is valueless if it do not lead to action. It will be of no service to the poor wretch shivering in the cold and famishing with hunger, if I say merely, "Dear! dear! what a pity!" while I do nothing whatever to relieve his distress; and in like manner my admission before the preacher and in my conscience that my course of life is radically bad, and that I must return to God, will be worthless unless I carry that resolution through. Nay, every time I feel in that way, unless I act upon my conviction, the emotion will become feebler and feebler, until by and by I shall be like those who are described by the apostle as "past feeling." To you, therefore, whose goodness has so often proved like the morning cloud, because you have never given over your evil habits, I would say, Break these fetters now. Over your besetting sin, whether intemperance or sensuality or covetousness, or whatever else it may be, the whole battle of your conversion is to be fought. This is in your heart very much what the famous farm-house was on the field of Waterloo; and on your taking that and holding it for Christ hinges your soul's salvation. You are standing at a

place where two roads meet, and it behoves you to take the one or the other. Take to the right, and though the struggle may be tremendous, your conscience and your God will approve. Take to the left, and though for a time your evil appetite may rejoice in its gratification, you will ere long discover that it is a bitter thing to forsake the Lord. Arise, therefore, and by the supplicated help of God's Holy Spirit break asunder the bonds of your evil habit. Do not persuade yourself that you can conquer it by degrees. That is a common but a serious mistake. There must be a "henceforth" beyond which you will never more return to it. Why should not this henceforth be for you this moment? Rise, then, in the might of your manhood, and by the help of God in Christ resolve that the time past of your life shall suffice to have wrought the will of the flesh. Rise, and begin to live indeed by living for the Lord, and then the law of habit will come in to help you, for the longer you practice holiness, the easier it will become. Oh, let me beseech you not to leave this house until you have registered on high a holy resolve never again to tamper with the temptation before which you have so often fallen, and with that sacred vow let this humble prayer ascend, "Hold thou up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not."

III. A third class of causes which operate in the way of obliterating religious impressions is connected with the conduct of professing Christians. The seriousness produced by some searching discourse is often wiped out by the thoughtless, flippant remarks of a so-called Christian on the way home from church. The peculiarities of the preacher are turned into ridicule, some unfortunate expression in his ser-

mon is twisted into all kinds of ludicrous shapes, the dress of this one and that one of the worshippers is criticised from every point of view; but the important subject which has been set before the audience is utterly ignored, and the anxious one, who was just waiting for some kindly hand of help to be held out to him, shrinks back into himself and says, "I need not trouble myself so much after all; if life to them is a matter of such levity, why may not I be equally unconcerned?" Or again, when some providential dispensation has softened the soul, the thoughtless indifference of those calling themselves Christians who know its trouble, but pass it by on the other side, may often destroy, nay, has often destroyed, all reverence in it for the religion of Jesus. While sometimes the unfair advantage taken by some prominent church member in a business transaction, or the open immorality of some flaming Pharisee has been enough to cause an awakened soul to say, "If that be Christianity, I am as well without it!"

Now, concerning this I have two remarks to make. The first shall be addressed to those who have really felt, or who may now feel, their religious convictions shaken from this cause. To them I say, religion is a personal thing. Every man must give account of himself to God, and these inconsistent professors of religion shall be answerable for their hypocrisy at the bar of his judgment. But their inconsistency will not excuse you. If one accused of theft in a human court were to say, in apology for his guilt, that "many who professed to be honest were no better than he," the answer of course would be, "That may all be true, but it does not dispose of the charge against you." So I do not deny that there may be members of the church who, in their daily conduct, are as bad as you affirm, but that will not justify you before God. Your

first plain duty is to look to your own salvation, and to seek to have your own soul renewed. "Take heed to yourselves," therefore, and then, having secured your own regeneration, see what you can do to convince these others of their guilt, and to bring them to a better life.

Besides, you know that all Christians are not like those whom you condemn. You do not judge of the value of a fruit tree from the few worm-eaten or rotten apples which are lying beneath it, and which it has, so to say, cast away from it, but rather from the multitudes which hang in rosy redness on its heavily weighted branches. So do not judge of the gospel from those whose sins the gospel itself condemns, but rather from those who are adorning it by their characters and lives. You know there are such, and these, too, by no means few in number. You reckon some of them among your own acquaintances. You cannot deny that with them Christianity is a reality. You have never been in their company for any length of time without feeling that they live "as seeing Him who is invisible." "If all Christians were like them," you have often said, "Christianity would mean something." Whenever, therefore, you are prone to dwell on the inconsistencies of hypocrites, recall such an one to your remembrance and that will keep you right.

Nay, more, recall the blessed example of the Lord himself, and the holy precepts which he enjoined, and then you will never think of holding him responsible for acts which he has so emphatically condemned. Be it yours, now, without farther delay, to yield your hearts to the power of the Holy Spirit, and then let your aim be to shame the formalist by the earnestness of your own devotion to the cause of Christ. "It is better to fight for the good than to rail at the ill." Enlist, therefore, under Christ's banner, and let your protest against the vanity of the formalist and the

guilt of the hypocrite take the practical form of a life dedicated to the service in all things of him who loved you and gave himself for you.

But, ye who profess and call yourselves Christians, my second remark in regard to this matter shall be addressed to you. See what stumbling-blocks your inconsistencies put in the way of sinners who may be seriously thinking of returning to God, and be warned to be watchful over your lives. They look to you for guidance. See to it, therefore, that your actions guide them rightly. It is to little purpose that we point out the fallacy of which they are guilty, when they blame the gospel and the Lord for your misdeeds. So long as your character or conduct belies your profession, they will continue to reason in that fallacious manner. It becomes you, therefore, to deprive them of the premises from which alone they can draw, logically or otherwise, this conclusion. Men who have never read the Bible with care will read you. Yes, and when they begin to read the Bible they will read it through you See then that your character does not refract the rays of its truth, and so bend them as to distort their meaning. Not every one can take his time from the sun, and so multitudes must always depend upon the clock. But if the clock would not mislead men, it must be constantly regulated by careful observation of the heavenly bodies. Professing Christian, you are the clock to many an ungodly man around you, and if you would not mislead him, you must seek to have yourself daily regulated by careful and devotional observation of the Sun of Righteousness. That which he sees in you may drive him away or keep him away from Christ; therefore keep you near the Lord, and seek to imbibe his Spirit, so that instead of standing in the inquirer's way, you may even be the means of helping him on and introducing him to Christ.

MEMORY AS AN ELEMENT IN FUTURE RETRIBUTION.

LUKE xvi. 25.—" Son, remember."

THE parable from which these words are taken is, perhaps, the most striking and terrible ever spoken by the Lord. It stands in immediate proximity to that of the prudent steward, and was designed to rivet the lesson which that had pointed and driven home. "If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches?"—so had the Great Teacher ended the former allegory, and now, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, he gives us a vivid illustration of unfaithfulness in the use of worldly possessions, and an awful warning of the consequences which flow from that form of sin.

But while this, its primary purpose, can be clearly traced all through the parable, there are also many other things of great importance suggested by it. I am aware, indeed, that in interpreting such portions of Scripture, there is always a danger of mistaking what may be called the accessories or drapery of the story for the essential elements of the allegory, and probably in no case is that danger greater than in the instance before us. Yet, supported as we are by other portions of the word of God, we cannot err in deducing from my text, when taken in connection with the position of him to whom it was addressed, the solemn truth, that memory is one great element in the

future retribution of the sinner. Leaving therefore for the present all the other questions raised by this parable out of view, let me concentrate your thoughts for a short time on this one topic. It is an awful theme; may God enable me to speak of it in tenderness and love.

Memory is that power of the soul by which it retains the knowledge acquired by the perceptions and consciousness of the past. It is that faculty which enables us to review the events of yesterday, and to bring into the light of the present the experiences and actions and mental acquisitions of bygone years. But for it we should be as ignorant of what happened in the past, as we are of what shall occur in the future; the mind would remain forever in the blank condition of infancy, and all that flitted before its view would leave no more impression upon it, than do the images which are reflected in a mirror on the smooth surface that reflects them. Without it, no process of reasoning could be carried on by us, and progress in any department of knowledge would be impossible. Without it the child could not retain his alphabet, the father could not remember his son, nor the son his father. Intercourse of man with man would be at an end, and history would become a blank. Without it the occupation of conscience would be gone, and responsibility would be but a name.

This faculty is thus most intimately connected with man's intellectual advancement, social progress, and moral character, and it is only when we examine thus minutely into its nature, that we become fully convinced of its importance. Its operations are altogether inscrutable by us, and we can give no other account concerning them than this: that God has so made us that our minds have this partic-

ular power. Different philosophers, indeed, have sought by ingenious hypotheses to explain its working; but, though they all go a certain length, yet none of them gives any real solution of the matter. We know the operations of memory only from our consciousness of them in ourselves, and our observations of their results in others. In some men it seems to resemble a storehouse, wherein are laid up, sometimes in methodical order and sometimes in loose confusion, the accumulated mass of facts, opinions, actions, and the like, which have become the individual's property either by being observed, or heard, or read by him. In others, it may be likened to some spacious picture-gallery, on the walls of which are hung reproductions, faithful as the finest specimens of photographic art, of all the scenes through which they have passed, or on which they have looked. In others still, one might speak of it as the haunted chamber of the soul, into which they never enter willingly, and in which, whenever they set foot in it, they are confronted with the gaunt spectres of the past, upbraiding them with folly and sin. Dark, hideous, horrible it is in the experience of all such, and to them no word more dread can be uttered than this one of my text, "remember," for it bids them face anew those ghastly shapes, more to be feared than "Gorgons, hydras, or chimeras dire."

But to take a wider view. Memory is in every man the infallible autobiographer of the soul, and on its pages, however much they may be now concealed from view, are recorded every thought and feeling, every word and action, everything experienced and everything perceived, during the course of life. As in our meteorological stations, by a delicate instrument, with which some of you may be acquainted, the strength

and direction of the wind are by the wind itself registered without intermission from hour to hour, so on the tablets of memory the whole history of the soul is by the soul itself recorded with the most minute and unerring exactness. Not indeed that all that is at every moment consciously present to the mind. There is such a thing as forgetfulness, but over against that we must place the fact that things forgotten at one time are remembered at another, so that we may fairly conclude that nothing is ever completely lost by the soul.

Sometimes that which memory has retained is brought up by an effort of will, as when we set ourselves by various expedients to recall that which, for the moment, has gone from us. Thus, let it be a name, or a fact, or a passage from a favorite author that we wish to recollect, and forthwith we are conscious of a search analogous to that of the merchant seeking in his desk for some missing document, or that of the woman lighting her candle and sweeping the house in quest of the lost piece of silver. Sometimes, again, the past is brought back upon us by an incidental association, as when the bereaved parent, by the sight of a little glove, or a tiny shoe, is reminded of his fair-haired darling, hears again her fairy prattle, sees again her merry gambols, and goes over anew all the painful details of that fatal sickness which took her from his arms. It may have been a score of years or more since the little one was laid beneath the sod, but swifter than the electric current, memory, at the bidding of that slight association, has travelled through the past, and lo! it is as fresh as yesterday, or, say rather, as vivid as to-day.

But to mention only one case more, sometimes memory is quickened by the power of conscience, and that which it retains is brought out to attest or confirm

the justice of the award which that inward judge has pronounced. So it is with the man who has done some guilty deed. He is not allowed to forget it. His memory, like the dog's-eared book of the sluggard school-boy, opens always at the same page, and confronts him with the record of his sin. Even in his sleep, remembrance gives a color to his dreams, and he awakes starting with alarm. What would he not give to be able to forget! What would he not sacrifice if he could but find some powerful agent which would wipe out the register of his iniquity!

It is this union of memory and conscience in the soul that renders the former so dreadful an element in retribution. Without conscience, memory would wear no terror, even as without memory, conscience would have no past wherewith to upbraid us. Memory furnishes the material on which conscience shall pronounce, and conscience gives to memory the sting which turns it into remorse. This is evident, even in the present life. Our own experience testifies thereto; and though a poet has sung in strains of beauty of the Pleasures of Memory, there are few of us who could not tell a thrilling tale of its agonies as well. But in the case of the world to come, over and above these things which make memory even here a scourge to the sinner, there are three considerations which are calculated to intensify its power of torment. I will mention and illustrate each of them.

1. Memory shall there recall the events of time as seen in the perspective of eternity. In the crowd and hurry of the present, things bulk before us disproportionately. We need to be at a distance from them before we can estimate them rightly. That is one reason why the past is seen always more correctly

when it is past, than it was when it was present; and why it is, that in taking a review of anything, we observe more clearly where we have failed, or in what we have been to blame, than we did at the time when we were engaged in it. Thus, in playing a game of chess, we all know how the success of our adversary throws back a light in which we see a carelessness or want of skill, of which at the moment of our making the unfortunate move we were unconscious. So in business, a retrospect reveals points of folly and stupidity which you did not see so fully at the time at which you were guilty of them, and for not having seen which now you very sternly upbraid yourself. Now let this principle be extended to the retrospect of life as a whole, which in eternity the lost sinner has to take, and you will at once perceive how things which seemed to be of little moment as he was engaging in them, will assume a solemnity and an importance there which will make each of them another lash in the scorpion scourge of conscience.

The light in which we stand determines what we see. If I stand within a brilliant room all gay with many lamps, and look out into the darkness of the night, I will see little or nothing; but if, out in the cold and cheerless night, I stand and look into the lustrous chamber, I will perceive everything that it contains. Now on earth we occupy a position analogous to that of him who looks from light into darkness, and we see comparatively little into the darkness of the future; but in the future world the sinner, in reviewing life, is looking from darkness back into the light, and so every minute thing is set vividly before his view. His misspent hours, his thoughtlessness, his folly, his secret sins, his presumptuous wickedness, all shall be brought out in their true importance,

while evermore shall rise from his heart the unavailing cry, "O that I had been wise! that I had understood this! that I had considered the latter end." Ah, my hearer! you may think little now of such every-day vices as profanity, dishonesty, intemperance, uncleanness, and the like; you may make light of your neglect of the Word of God, and your rejection of Jesus Christ, the only Saviour; you may even make merry over your iniquities and glory in your shame; but when you look back on these things from the view-point of eternity, they shall overwhelm you with their enormity and sink you by their weight. You may despise now the blessings which you enjoy, but when they have gone from you to return nevermore, you shall see them in their proper brightness, and upbraid yourselves for your madness in letting them go unimproved.

2. But another thing calculated to intensify the power of memory as an instrument in the retribution of the future life, is the fact that there it shall be quickened in its exercise, and we shall not be able to forget anything. We have seen that, as we now are, memory is by no means perfect. Things are forgotten or lost sight of, and the events of the past are jostled aside by the occurrences of the present, so that it is not until some incidental association revives them, that they form again the objects of our thought. In the world beyond, however, this shall be no more the case, but memory shall, with the utmost fidelity, perform its office, and

> "Painted on the eternal wall
> The past shall reappear."

Things of which we are now oblivious shall there be brought back with lurid distinctness to our remembrance, and actions long buried beneath the sands of

time shall, like the ruins of Pompeii, be dug up again into the light, and stand before us as they were at first. Among ancient manuscripts which modern research has brought to light, there are some, called by learned men palimpsests, in which it has been discovered that what was originally a gospel or an epistle, or other book of holy scripture, had been written over by a mediæval scribe with the effusions of a profane poet; but now, by the application of some chemical substance, the original sacred record has been reproduced, and is used as an authority in settling the reading of disputed passages. So the pages of memory are palimpsests. They have been often written over, and though now perhaps the latest inscriptions alone are visible, yet, in the after state, through the application of the alchemy of the divine justice, each separate record shall be rendered legible, and not one jot or tittle of its faithful register shall remain concealed. Say not that this is impossible. They who have been rescued from drowning have testified that in the brief season during which they were submerged, they lived over again their lives, and minor acts of disobedience, unremembered from the moment of their commission, did then come up before them; and if this was possible in their circumstances, can it be doubted that the same effect can be produced by God's judicial act? The book of memory shall form one of the most important of the books of judgment, and when it is opened by God's hand (and who may tell all which that opening implies?) there shall be found confronting the sinner in characters of legible distinctness, the record of his sins. Oh, how shall you face that ordeal?

3. But yet another thing which will intensify the

power of memory as an element in future retribution is the fact that, in the case of the lost, conscience shall be rectified and give just utterances regarding the events reviewed. We have seen that it is the union of memory and conscience that gives moral power to both. A faithless memory will prevent conscience from being faithful; but, on the other hand, a faithless conscience will neutralize the moral influence of a faithful memory. This is one reason why, on earth, memory, terrible as it is to many men, is not a hundredfold more so. Its reports are given to a conscience that is asleep, or seared, or perverted, and so no action of a moral kind is taken on them, and no remorse is felt. The balance in which the statements made by memory are weighed is false, and so the issue is the opposite of what it ought to be. But, in the future state, conscience will be adjusted. At the last great tribunal it shall be, so to say, reset. Its peace cannot then be restored. Its purity cannot then be re-bestowed. But it shall be made an accurate indicator, and a faithful reprover of the guilt of every sin which memory brings before it. As he now is, the sinner can look back with mirth on some hour of frantic dissipation, or some deed of shame; but then conscience will compel him to contemplate such things with the agony of remorse. As he now is, he can congratulate himself on having done a clever thing when he has overreached his neighbor; but then he will lose sight of the cleverness of the act in the guilt by which it was characterized. As he now is, he can gloss over his excesses by speaking of himself, in the specious and entirely deceptive phraseology of the world, as "fast," or "a little wild," or "sowing his wild oats," or the like; but then conscience will insist on calling things by their right names, and each act of wicked-

ness will stand out before him as rebellion against God. As he now is, he may try to turn away his guilt, on the hinge of some "nevertheless," like him of whom it is written, "he was sorry, nevertheless, for the oath's sake, and the sake of them that were with him, he commanded it to be brought unto her;" but then, conscience will admit no such plea, and the sin which he flatters himself into believing was a kind of duty, or at least a necessity, will appear in its true light; while that which he supposed was shared with him by others, will not divide itself into different parts, but will fasten itself on him alone. It has found him out.

Thus, with conscience rectified and memory quickened, it is not difficult to account for the agony of the lost, while at the same time the retributive consequences of sin in the future life are seen to be not the effects of some arbitrary and capricious sentence, but the natural and necessary results of violating the law which was written at first upon our moral constitution.

But that I may make the impression somewhat deeper, let me apply these observations in one or two directions.

1. Look at them in their bearing on the privileges which at present we so lightly esteem. Is it indeed true that each of them shall come up before the sinner at last with an importance deepened by the conviction that if he had improved them he had not been in the place of woe? Is it so, that no single one of them shall then be overlooked? and that his neglect of them shall be regarded by him as not only the maddest infatuation, but also the deepest sin? Is all this really the case? Then what a mass of fuel he is gathering now, wherewith to feed the flames of hell!

The Bible which he has despised; the Sabbaths which he has profaned; the means of grace which he has slighted; the pardon and regeneration through Christ which he has trampled under foot; a father's instructions scoffed at, a mother's expostulations resisted, a pastor's affectionate earnestness resented as meddlesome intrusion, how will all these, not in the aggregate mass, but with individual and definite minuteness, come crowding back upon him, and fill him with the bitterest self-reproach! Ah, ye, who are thus systematically turning away from the privileges which God has put at your very hands, little do ye reflect what a fearful heritage you are laying up for yourselves in the after life! Every blessing disregarded now will there be recalled by memory, and transformed by conscience into an upbraiding reprover and an horrible tormentor. Is it not time, therefore, to pause in your mad career, and to return unto the Lord your God? Why will you persist in "treasuring up for yourselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God"?

2. Again, let us apply the principles which have been before our minds this morning to the opportunities of doing good to others which we have allowed to go by us unimproved. Behold here, how the conscience of this man gives sting to his memory as he recalls the resources which were at his command, and sees now how much he might have done with them for the promotion of the welfare and happiness of his fellow-men! What were the crumbs which Lazarus had received from his table, compared with the good he might have done to multitudes of forlorn and hapless ones who were in rags and wretchedness? Had he but used his wealth as he might have done, he would have provided some means whereby the sick and suffering might have been

cared for, so that the kindness of the dogs in licking the beggar's sores would not have shamed and reproved the thoughtlessness of their master. Observe, also, how he now recalls his intercourse with his brethren in his father's house, and remembers that he had never used any means, directly or indirectly, to prevent either his own destruction or theirs. Never before had he seen his responsibility for them as he sees it now, and now that he does see it in its true light, he is not able to act according to its directions, so that the perception of it only magnifies and intensifies his agony.

But is there no voice of warning in all this to us? What a host of opportunities we are continually neglecting! How many that we saw have we systematically ignored, passing them as the priest and Levite passed the half-dead traveller, "on the other side"! How many that lay at our very hands we never perceived until they had irrecoverably gone! and how poorly we have improved even those which we have attempted to turn to good account! We can see all this in some degree now, but how much more weird and terrible would the retrospect be, if we were where this rich man is described as being. I do not know that there is in English literature anything more startling and salutary than the lesson Thomas Hood has pointed in his "Lady's Dream," when, confronted with the dark and loathsome insignia of death, the votary of fashionable selfishness is led to look back upon her life, and sees what she might have done but did not do:

> "The wounds I might have healed,
> The human sorrow and smart!
> And yet it never was in my soul
> To play so ill a part.
> But evil is wrought by want of thought
> As well as want of heart."

This is the great teaching of the parable before me in respect of the opportunities of life. May God help us to lay it well to heart! A lost opportunity is not simply a misfortune, it is a crime. Conscience will call it the murder of a brother, and will give him who is guilty of it a place beside him who cried, "Am I my brother's keeper?" For is it not written thus, "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn to death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?"

But why, my dear friends, have I dwelt so long on this awful theme? I have done so that I may magnify before you the riches of that grace which through Jesus Christ is able to save us from such dreadful suffering. I have done so that I may bring to bear upon you the strength of all that motive power which the consideration of such fearful things produces, and so induce you "to flee from the wrath to come." Sinner! is there not enough in the thoughts which I have presented to you now to give you pause? "Don't write there," said a little newspaper boy to a dandified youth, whom in the waiting-room of a railway station he saw about to scratch something with his diamond ring on a mirror that was hanging on the wall." "Don't write there!" "Why not?" "Because you can't rub it out!" So would I have you, my unconverted hearer, to be careful what you write, in your words and actions, on the tablets of your memory. You can't rub it out! and as you think of that surely you will agree with me that "the time past of your lives may suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles."

But is there no escape from the bitterness of memory and the stings of conscience? Blessed be God, there is! We may escape them both, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. His blood, shed in atonement for the sins of men, will wash away the stains of the believer's guilt, and his Spirit, shed abroad in the hearts of those who receive him, will purge and pacify their consciences. Trust in him is the true Lethe-stream, the drinking of which secures forgetfulness of all that is remorseful in the past. His blood, applied to the tablets of the memory, bleaches out of them all upbraiding guilt, and leaves upon them only material for praise. Nay, more; his Spirit, bestowed upon us in connection with our faith, disposes us to improve our privileges, and to see and seize upon every fleeting opportunity of honoring him, by serving our fellow-men. What other men cannot do for us, and what we cannot do for ourselves, he will perform in us and on us. He will blot out our transgressions. He will change our characters. He will make memory a treasury of joy to us, and a chamber of thankfulness. He will take for us the remorse out of the past, and the terror out of the future. In proportion therefore to the greatness of the misery which I have been seeking to portray, is the grandeur of the salvation which delivers from it. And if while you have been listening you have been thrilled with fear, let the fear move you to repair to him who only can deliver you. But repair to him at once. There is no changing of character, and no possibility of salvation in the future world. Hear these words: "Besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from hence." If you are to

secure salvation at all, therefore, you must secure it in this life. Let me implore you to turn from sin to Jesus, and so secure it now. Another opportunity of acquiring this priceless blessing has been put before you; another warning of the danger you incur in letting it go past unimproved has been addressed to you; perhaps even another resolution to break off your sins by righteousness and return unto the Lord is made by you this moment. It rests with yourself to determine whether that opportunity shall be lost, that warning neglected, that resolution broken, as so many have been before, or whether this service shall be ever gratefully remembered by you, as the turning-point of your history, from which you first set out for heaven. My discourse to-day has been to me indeed "the burden of the Lord." I have not shunned to declare unto you what I believe to be all the counsel of God on this awful subject. May he himself employ it for the conversion of men!

GOD'S MESSAGE TO THE DESPONDING.

ISAIAH l. 10.—"Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God."

IT is not, as you see from these words, a thing unheard of or impossible, that a child of God should "walk in darkness and have no light." And when the sadness of such an experience comes upon the saint, it will not be always safe to say that it is the shadow of some special sin. No doubt, when we hear David cry, "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation," we are right in concluding that if he had not committed that great transgression which stains his name, he would not, at that time at least, have needed to present such a petition. So, also, when we see Elijah "under the juniper tree," and hear his pitiful wail, "O Lord, take away my life now," we cannot but feel that his flight from the post of duty is bearing its appropriate fruit. But the case described in my text is different from these. It is that of one who even at the moment "feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant," while yet he has lost the radiant happiness of the new life, and is bending under the weight of spiritual despondency.

Many would say flippantly that a Christian must be very feeble indeed if he is ever in such a state, and some would say cruelly, that he who permits himself thus to be "in heaviness" cannot be a Christian at all. But all such unqualified assertions spring out of a shallow

philosophy, and a superficial experience. For God does not change toward us with the mutations of our frames and feelings. Our salvation depends on Christ, and not on our emotions regarding it. They may rise and fall like the waves of the ocean, but he and the salvation which is in him are as stable as the stars. The security of the saint is rooted in the fact that God has a hold of him, and not at all in his consciousness that he has a hold of God. His comfort may be affected by the latter, but his safety is due entirely to the former.

Hence, they who roundly affirm that if a man be walking in darkness and finding no light he cannot be a Christian, are making salvation depend, not on God's work for a man and in him, but simply and entirely on his own emotions. Moreover, they are strangely oblivious of some of the best-known passages in the history even of the most eminent saints. Out of what other experience than that of despondency was such a psalm as the forty-second born? Yet who will say that its author, even at the very moment when he was singing it, was not truly a child of God? Whence came that pathetic undertone that trembles beneath some of Paul's richest autobiographic passages, if not from the occasional distress that steals over every thoughtful man as he becomes increasingly conscious of the distance between him and his ideal? or as he hears, now fainter and now more distinct, like the roar of the surge upon the shore, the unceasing sound of the sins and sufferings of mankind? Whence, again, that soothing utterance of Peter, as he says to his friends, "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness," if not from his own experience of the effect of suffering on a sensitive and ardent nature?

Thus it is not only uncharitable but untrue to say that despondency must be always traced to sin; and he who unfeelingly alleges that if a soul be in sadness it has never been really renewed, may yet be led to revise his theory of the Christian life, as he passes through some valley of shadow, or lies in some dark Gethsemane, sobbing out the cry, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Immense harm has been done sometimes to a timid, shrinking, yet conscientious spirit by such thoughtless and unsympathetic utterances; so let it stand out clear and distinct before you this morning, as the first inference we draw from this text, that a man may be a sincere, earnest, and devout follower of the Lord Jesus, and yet "be walking in darkness."

But while his despondency furnishes no valid reason for calling the genuineness of his religion in question, it is very far from being a comfortable thing in itself. It is not a state of mind in which any one desires to remain. And he should be encouraged to get out of it as quickly as possible. For it puts everything about him into shadow. It sets all his songs to a minor key. It gives to all his prayers a wailing pathos. It takes away much of his buoyancy and elasticity for work. And it stamps his countenance with a settled melancholy, which gives to those around him a disagreeable impression as to the results of serving God. It is, therefore, in every way desirable, both for his own happiness and for the good of others, that he should be brought out of the darkness into the light.

Now, it may contribute to the production of that result, if I turn your thoughts for a little to the causes out of which despondency may spring, and to the

counsels which in this text are given to those who are suffering from it.

Adverting, then, to the causes of spiritual despondency, I mention, first, that it may spring from natural temperament. However we may account for it, whether on the principle of hereditary transmission, or on that of special characteristics being given directly by God to every man, it is the fact that each of us is born with a certain predisposition to joy or sadness, to irascibility or patience, to quickness of action or deliberateness of conduct, which we call temperament. And it is also true, that while conversion may Christianize that temperament, it does not change it. The sanguine man does not become after conversion a melancholy man. But then, on the other hand, the man of melancholy temperament is not made over into the sanguine when he comes to Christ. The Lord takes men as they are, and works in and through their very idiosyncrasies, so as to produce in his church that unity in variety which is the charm of the physical universe.

Now, there are some men to whom, Christianity altogether apart, it comes as natural to be joyful as it does to the lark to sing its morning carol as it mounts into mid-heaven. And there are others, alas! whose disposition inclines them always to look on the darker side of things. In the former case there is no merit in the gladness, just as in the latter there is no blame in the sadness. In truth, if we were to get at all the facts of both cases, we might see that the man who was so generally desponding had in reality made far more exertion to cultivate joy than the other had done. For we are often shamefully unjust in our estimates of our fellows. In a class at school the

first prize is often gained by a boy who did nothing to secure it. God made him so bright and quick that he could not help out-distancing all the rest, while the boy in the middle was perhaps ten times more diligent than he; but not having such original capital to work on, he made a poorer show. And in the same way many a man gets credit for good temper, who never knew what it was to be provoked; while he who has restrained his explosiveness by great effort nine times, is reputedly a fiery-tempered man, because the dynamite caught fire and burst on the tenth. We don't know what is restrained, we only know what comes out. And the same thing holds in this matter of despondency. We see the melancholy, but we do not see and we cannot know the daily efforts and prayers that are made by the man to overcome it. But Christ knows. And he will not be unjust like men. He will not make it, as men so often do, a thing to banter and ridicule you for. He knows it is a real trial, and he will give you honor in proportion to your effort to get above it. Do not fret, therefore, over that which is the result of temperament. Keep resisting it, and take to yourself the helping hand which the Lord stretches down to you in the precious injunction of my text.

Again, spiritual despondency may be caused by disease. The connection between the soul and the body is both intimate and mysterious. They act and react upon each other; so that while it is true that the power of the will may keep the body up under protracted and severe labor, it is also true that the condition of the body tinges and affects the experience of the soul. That which we call lowness of spirits is very often the result of some imprudence in diet, or some local disturbance. It would not do, of course,

to resolve all spiritual phenomena thus into the consequences of our physical state. But every one who has given attention to the subject in any degree knows that the sound body is in all ordinary cases necessary to the sound mind; and I believe that a Christian physiologist could render no better service to many desponding spirits than by preparing a work which should treat of the effects of different diseases on religious experience. I know that in the course of my pastoral life, now extending nearly to a quarter of a century, I have seen many phases of so-called spiritual depression, or exaltation, which I could only account for, under God, from the nature of the maladies with which the different individuals have been afflicted. Thus I have literally waded with a friend for months through the swelling river, and battled with the waves of despondency that were breaking over him; yet, though I knew that he was a noble Christian, I did not lose my faith either in him or in God, because his disease was of the liver, and he saw things through a jaundiced eye. Again, I have heard great words of joyful confidence, and even of ecstasy come from those whose natures I knew were wanting in depth and stability, and if the truth must be told I did not set much store by them, for their disease was one which excited to hopefulness, and tended to lull every suspicion to sleep.

Now see the relief which all this affords. It removes from religion the responsibility for the depression of such a man as Cowper, and traces his spiritual gloom to disease of the brain; while, on the other hand, it takes away from Christianity all reproach for the hypocrisy of the man who, while he seemed to be on his death-bed, talked with the unction of a saint, and then got well again, to transgress like an aban-

doned sinner; for there, too, the exhilaration was due to the peculiar character of the malady under which he was suffering. Many, I fear, will doubt these things; but when they have been at as many sick-beds and death-beds as I have been, they may see reason to revise their opinion. At any rate, I am sure of this, that spiritual depression is very often the first indication of bodily disease, and that the medical attendant is fully as necessary in many cases as the spiritual adviser. Now when we can trace our despondency to such a cause, it will cease to be a thorn to us. It will weigh heavily upon us, indeed, but it will no longer seem to us as if the Lord had deserted us, and so the trial will be deprived of its sting. One whom I knew had the Seventy-seventh Psalm read to him while he lay dying, and when he heard the tenth verse, "And I said this is my infirmity," he broke in with these words, "That's my liver. My soul and body so act one upon the other. With the liver wrong, the mind gets clouded, and I feel as though God had swept me out of his house as useless; but after he has taken so much trouble to mould the vessel, he will not throw it aside." There you see was depression, but without the sting, and the reason was because the sufferer recognized the spiritual effect of his disease.

But I hasten to remark further that spiritual despondency is often the result of trial. Think of Peter's words: "Ye are in heaviness through manifold trials." One affliction will not usually becloud our horizon. But when a whole series of distresses comes on us in succession, the effect is terrible. First, it may be, comes sickness, and we are getting round from that when business difficulties overwhelm us. These are scarcely arranged before bereavement comes; and while we are still in the valley, we are set upon

by Apollyon in the shape of some scandalous accuser who seeks to rob us of our good name. Thus we are for years, it may be, passing through an experience like that of the sailor who is seeking to round a stormy cape, and is continually baffled by some cause or other, so that for weeks, as each morning breaks, there is still the same weariful headland beside him, with its dreary frown. Only those who have passed through such a series of afflictions, and who can say, in the words of the old prophet, "He hath barked my fig-tree and made it clean bare," can tell how much there is in such a history to weigh the spirit down. Nay, the same effect may be produced by the mere monotony of our labor, without any special affliction. To have the same things to do day after day for months; to fill in one's constant round of duties with gin-horse regularity; to feel as the years revolve that one is degenerating more and more into a machine—oh, who among us has not experienced the depression which is caused by such a history? How many of us can enter into the feelings which Faber thus pathetically describes:

> "Love adds anxiety to toil,
> And sameness doubles cares;
> While one unbroken chain of work
> The flagging temper wears."

O ye mothers and housekeepers, you know what is meant by the assertion that "sameness doubles cares;" and it is when such a burden is lying most heavily upon the heart that the words of my text come to us with their soothing influence, as sometimes the music of a song chanted by a wandering street singer steals into a troubled dream, and awakes us to comfort and security.

But to mention no more, spiritual despondency may

be caused by mental perplexity. We are living in an age when the spirit of inquiry and bold independent criticism is abroad. The sacred things of our faith are assailed. The old beliefs are once more on their trial, and when a youth reaches the age when he must exchange a traditional piety for a personal conviction, he is plunged for the time into the greatest misery. It seems to him almost as if everything were giving way beneath him. One assails him on the supernatural character of Christ; another, on the authority of the Scriptures; and others, bolder still, will question even the existence of God to him. And so he is launched on a black and stormy sea, over which he toils in rowing, and even when in the fourth watch the Lord appears to him marching over the waves, he is so broken down that he mistakes the Master for a ghost, and is terrified and affrighted. I tell you, friends, that when a soul is called to pass through such an ordeal it is no mere superficial anxiety that is felt. It is agony—deep, intense, enduring; and I charge you, when your children are wrestling their way through it, that you do not upbraid them or blame them, but help them by entering into their difficulties, and removing if you can every stumbling-block from their path. And let those who are thus walking in darkness take to themselves the comfort of my text, and walk on in the full assurance that there is light beyond.

II. But now it is time to look at the counsels to the desponding which are given or suggested by this text. And here, very evidently, the first thing to be said is that the oppressed spirit must keep on fearing the Lord and obeying the voice of his servant. Whatever happens, these must not be given up. Nothing whatever can furnish any proper reason for ceasing to prac-

tice them; while, on the other hand, the neglect of them will only deepen the darkness that is already over you. If, therefore, your depression comes from temperament, or disease, or trial, never think of giving up God and his service. The tunnel may be long, but it will come to an end at last, if only you will go through it. But if you stand still in it you will be always in its darkness. Walk on, therefore, and whatever you feel, let no evil be wrought by you, but keep steadily in the path of rectitude. And if you are involved in skeptical difficulties, let the same principle regulate you. Amid all your doubts you must accept some things as certain; hold by these, then, and act up to them, so will you prove that you are a docile learner, and put yourself into a position where you will catch the first glimpses of returning light.

Very instructive in this regard is the experience recorded by Frederick W. Robertson, of his striving toward the light, in that terrible spiritual conflict which he fought out among the solitudes of the Tyrol. In one of his letters written there he says: "Some things I am certain of, and these are my *Ursachen*, which cannot be taken away from me. I have got so far as this: Moral goodness and moral beauty are realities, lying at the basis and beneath all forms of the best religious expressions." And, generalizing from his own case, he thus addressed the working-men of Brighton, in words which I delight to quote, because, though I did not meet with them until after I had written the former part of this discourse, they corroborate in the strongest manner what I have already said:

"It is an awful hour—let him who has passed through it say how awful—when this life has lost its meaning and seems shrivelled into a span; when the grave appears to be the end of all, human

goodness nothing but a name, and the sky above this universe a dead expanse, black with the void from which God himself has disappeared. In that fearful loneliness of spirit, when those who should have been his friends and counsellors only frown upon his misgivings and profanely bid him stifle his doubts, I know but one way in which a man may come forth from his agony scatheless; it is by holding fast to those things which are certain still—the grand, simple landmarks of morality. In the darkest hour through which a human soul can pass, whatever else is doubtful, this, at least, is certain. If there be no God and no future state, yet even then it is better to be generous than selfish; better to be chaste than licentious; better to be true than false; better to be brave than to be a coward. Blessed beyond all earthly blessedness is the man who, in the tempestuous darkness of the soul, has dared to hold fast these venerable landmarks. Thrice blessed is he who, when all is cheerless within and without, when the teachers terrify him and his friends shrink from him, has obstinately clung to moral good. Thrice blessed, because his night shall pass into clear, bright day."

If there be any young man before me passing through this terrible ordeal, let him take to himself the direction and the comfort of these eloquent sentences. Or, if he would have the same thing in homelier phrase, let him remember that only by acting up to the level of our present convictions can we rise to higher things. Sometimes an evil life has led to a shipwreck of the faith; but always a good character clarifies the spiritual conception; for has not Jesus said, "If any man be willing to do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God?" Keep your conduct abreast of your conscience, and very soon your conscience will be illumined by the radiance of God.

But to the desponding believer the second thing to be said is, keep on trusting God. What a blessed privilege it is to be permitted to do that! My Bible would not be so precious to me as it is to-day if I

could not read these words in it: "Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God." When we cannot see, it is an unspeakable blessing to have some hand to cling to; and when that hand is God's, it is all right. But let us take the full comfort of these sayings. "Let him trust in the name of the Lord." What is that name? It is "Jehovah, God, merciful and gracious; long-suffering; purifying iniquity, transgression and sin; and who will by no means clear the guilty." Therefore I need not despair about my guilt, for there is forgiveness with him. What is that name? It is Jehovah Tsidkenu—the Lord our righteousness. Therefore I may in him have "boldness in the day of judgment." What is that name? It is Jehovah Ropheka—the Lord that healeth thee. Therefore I may bring all my spiritual maladies, and this of despondency among them, to him for cure. What is that name? It is Jehovah Jireh—the Lord will provide. Therefore in every time of strait I may rest assured that he will give me that which is needful. What is that name? It is Jehovah Nissi—the Lord my banner; and as I unfurl that signal and wave it over me, I may see in it the symbol of his protection. What is that name? It is Jehovah Shalom—the Lord of peace; and so, beneath his sheltering wing, I may be forever at rest.

Then let us not fail to note the deep meaning of that word "stay." It does not bid you only take a momentary grasp of God's hand. It encourages you to lean your whole weight upon him, and to do that continuously. What can harm you, brother, while you are thus permitted to cast, not your care, only, but yourself, on God? Come, then, and lay down your weary self upon him. He will not cast you off. And, that you may know what laying yourselves down on him



implies, let me gratify myself by repeating to you these exquisite lines:

"I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies.

"And if my heart and flesh are weak
To bear an untried pain,
The bruisèd reed he will not break,
But strengthen and sustain.

"No offering of my own I have,
Nor works my faith to prove,
I can but give the gifts he gave,
And plead his love for love.

"And so beside the silent sea
I wait the muffled oar,
No harm from him can come to me,
On ocean or on shore.

"I know not where his islands lift
Their fronded palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond his love and care.

"O brothers! if my faith is vain,
If hopes like these betray,
Pray for me that my feet may gain
The sure and safer way.

"And thou, O Lord! by whom are seen
Thy creatures as they be,
Forgive me if too close I lean
My human heart on thee." *

But, you say, what warrant have I thus to lean on God? I might answer, is not his own word enough? But I prefer to reply, look at the cross of Calvary, and

* Whittier's *Poems*, vol. II. pp. 426, 427.

see there how much he loves you. Do you think he would have given there his Son to death for you if he were not willing, also, to give you everything needed by you to sustain you through life? Jesus cried, "My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?" just that you might never feel yourself forsaken. He took even the blackness of your darkness on him that he might lead you into the light. Therefore, stay upon God, and take for yourself this comfort, that when you have passed through this trial you will be twice the man you were before, for all purposes of Christian usefulness. Your own experience will put pathos into your heart, which will be itself a power as you seek to plead with others; for the Lord is now giving you the tongue of the learned, that you may know to speak "a word in season to him that is weary." It is a painful education, but the result is a rare and beautiful accomplishment. Do you think Whittier could have sung those thrillingly penetrative lines which I have just repeated, and which find their way down to the deep places of men's souls, if he had never known despondency? Do you imagine Robertson could have spoken that noble passage which I quoted a few minutes ago, if he had not been describing himself in it? And was not Paul the prince of comforters, because he comforted others with the consolation wherewith himself was comforted of God? Yea, is not the Lord able to succor them that are tempted, in that he himself suffered, being tempted? Hold on, hope on, trust on, for such sadness as yours is the forerunner of true joy; and the tears you shed are preparing the seed which in coming days you are to sow. Thus out of the eater will come forth meat, and out of the bitter sweetness.

But some one may say, "This is all an artificial thing. I have no despondency, because I have no re-

ligion. Let men live as I do, taking the world's joy, and they need not concern themselves about anything else." Say you so, my friend? Then this is for you, and as it is the very next verse to my text, the contrast is overwhelming: "Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourself about with sparks; walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks that ye have kindled; this shall ye have of mine hand, ye shall lie down in sorrow." The Christian has all his sadness here, and he passes hereafter into a region of sunnier skies and serener air, where sorrow and sighing shall never come. But you have all your gladness here, and you shall pass into that place where "there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." Which is the better? I have had trials—some of them dark enough. But I deliberately say that I would rather pass through these again, if I might retain under them the hope of unending felicity hereafter, than enjoy the richest gladness that the worldling knows, with no God to stay myself upon and no heaven to look to as my home. Oh, that staying upon God! If you only knew how much it means, you would not put it thus away from you. Come, then, and acquaint yourself with him, through Jesus Christ, so shall you know that there is something better even in the Christian's despondency, than there is in the unbeliever's joy.

UNCONSCIOUS DETERIORATION.

HOSEA vii. 9.—"Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not."

THESE words describe the spiritual condition of the kingdom of Israel in the turbulent times which followed the reign of the second Jeroboam, and during the later portion of the lengthened ministry of the prophet Hosea. Falsehood, theft, and wickedness of every sort were rampant in the land; and as one king after another took possession of the throne, it seemed as if, in eager rivalry, each sought to outdo in iniquity all those who went before him. Sometimes anarchy and interregnum varied the character of the country's ills; and at length, as in the time of the decline of the Roman empire, the throne became the possession of him who had the might to seize it, and the cruelty to put to death every other claimant for it. Nor were the enormities of the time confined to the rulers; "for the wicked walk on either hand when vile men are exalted." The thief robbed from within and the spoiler spoiled from without. Sin in its worst forms was prevalent among the people. Their strength was consumed by their indulgence in kinds of wickedness which strangers had introduced among them; and everything about them betokened, to those who could read the signs aright, that they were rapidly hastening to national extinction. Of all this, however, they were themselves unconscious. They imagined that they were strong as at other times, and dreamed that long

years of prosperity were yet before them. Like the shorn Samson, they "wist not that the Lord had departed from them;" and recked not of the destruction that was so soon to overtake them, when the armies of Assyria should sweep over their land like a resistless tide, and bear back on the refluent wave the entire inhabitants into hopeless exile. They were undermined in strength, and were not aware of it; they were already in the old age of their history, and they knew it not. And this unconsciousness of their true condition was the saddest feature of their case. They were like a man who has crossed the boundary between manhood and old age, and who has not discovered the effect which the lapse of years has had upon him, but is only awakened to the truth by his utter helplessness in the face of some critical emergency. Hence the prophet says regarding Ephraim, "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not; yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not."

Now we have something very much like this in the religious history of many among ourselves; for this unconsciousness of deterioration it is which marks the distinction between the common backslider and the open repudiator of the faith. We are, alas! only too familiar, in these days of unsettlement, with the case of the man who has abjured the religion of his youth. Brought up by pious parents and trained to pray at his mother's knee, he has early come under religious impressions. He has received the truth in simple trustfulness from the lips of those who were dearest to him, and for a time he has rejoiced in the peace which is ever the first-fruit of faith. But after a while there came an epoch, when he had to exchange a mere traditional religion for one of personal

conviction; and, in that transitional stage, he was caught in the currents of our modern unbelief, so that one after another his old faiths have gone from him; and now he is, to use the convenient word which has been coined to describe him, an agnostic, having no belief in reference to religion save this, that nothing can be certainly known regarding it. But all this has not been without something of the nature of a struggle in him. Not without a pang did he give up the hopes that were once dear to him. He knows the change that has passed upon him, and sometimes yet he looks wistfully back, and almost sighs, "O that it were with me as in months past." The memory of his father's godliness haunts him; occasionally, too, the spell of his mother's prayers is over him. He knows what he has lost, and in that knowledge lies the hope of his restoration. Nay, if he shall meet with a wise, sympathizing Christian friend, who has had to face and master for himself the same difficulties, he may be, as many such have been, led back to the feet of Jesus, to give him the homage of an intelligent and whole-hearted loyalty. That, I say, is an experience with which we are in these days only too familiar, and the man who is passing through it, who has let go everything that once was a faith to him, is to be sympathized with, and helped and prayed for, even if he should sometimes break out into bitter invective against the gospel; for the very bitterness of his invective may be the means he is using to make himself forget his misery, and may serve only to reveal his consciousness of the difference between what he is and what he was. He knows that he is different, and in that knowledge there is yet hope for him.

But it is not thus—in the initial stages of the process, at least—with ordinary backsliding; for in that

the most dangerous element is that the man is largely unaware of the change that has come over him. To the view of those around him he is very far from being what he once was. They remember when he passed through a religious crisis very sharp and decided, after which in word, and temper, and conduct, he was apparently desirous of doing honor to the Lord. But now, all that was distinctive of him as a Christian seems to have been somehow rubbed down. He has lost his watchfulness over his speech; his relish for the society of the people of God; his delight in ordinances; his interest in all earnest efforts for the well-being of others; and his sensitiveness of conscience as to the conventionalities of trade and society. But he does not know it; he is not concerned about it; he thinks that all is well with him, because he can point to his past history and his present position in the church. Is he not still "in good and regular standing" on the communion roll? There can be, therefore, nothing wrong with him, and so, though the evidences of declension are seen on him by every onlooker, and deplored by every Christian brother, they are unnoticed by himself.

Now I do not wish to undervalue the danger of the man who has deliberately and knowingly parted with his faith, and yet I have no hesitation in affirming that this latter case is far more perilous than his; because the one man knows what he has done, and the other is unaware of his condition. The one man is awake and may take action at once for his recovery; the other is asleep, and needs first to be awakened before he will take measures for his restoration. It may serve a good purpose, therefore, as tending to keep us from deceiving ourselves, or to reveal us truly to ourselves, if we attempt this morning to account

for the fact that a man may have largely fallen away from Christian rectitude of heart and life without being aware of his defection. I want, if I can, to explain and account for the element of unconsciousness which characterizes backsliding, and which is one of the most dangerous features in it, and the exposure of the causes will be itself an indication of the nature of the remedy.

How comes it then, let me ask, that a man may slip away from earnestness in the Christian life, into a condition of spiritual decrepitude, without knowing it? I answer, in the first place, because we are all inclined to look more favorably on ourselves than on others. We mark the changes in the external appearance of our neighbors far more exactly than we do those which manifest themselves in our own. We see the pallor of disease, or the wrinkles of care, or the stoop of old age, far more readily in another than we do in ourselves. When two friends who have been separated for many years meet again, each says to the other, "How changed you are!" but neither has taken note of the alterations in himself; and when disease is invading the frame, the visitor notices its progress far more distinctly than does the patient himself. But it is not otherwise in spiritual matters, for in these also we are far more quick to discern the defections of our neighbors than our own. The Scottish poet has truly said that

> "If self the wavering balance shake,
> It's rarely right adjusted."

One sees the mote in his brother's eye, while he is unconscious of the beam that is in his own. He can speak of the falling away of his neighbor with severity;

but when you bid him examine himself, the case is altered, and a different standard is brought into operation. His self-love, or self-conceit, or self-security prevents him from coming to an impartial decision, and he may be far gone in a course of backsliding before he takes note of the fact. The victim of dissipation observes the traces of excess on another, and may even moralize over the folly of which he is guilty; but he is all unconscious of the unnatural flabbiness, the unwholesome color, the unsteady hand, and the blood-shot eyes which others see in himself. And, in a similar way, the man who is himself declining in spiritual health may be, very often is, blind to his own defections, while yet he has a clear perception of the backslidings of others. Now, how shall this evil be prevented? By trying ourselves fairly by the standard of God's Word, and by laying ourselves open in earnest supplication to the inspection of the Lord himself. Matthew Henry has somewhere said that "apostasy from God generally begins at the closet;" and I am sure that a regular, intelligent, and sincere employment of those means of grace which centre there would keep us from the self-deception which I am now seeking to expose. No one can look fairly into the mirror of the Word, without discovering what manner of man he is; and however much a man may be disposed to play the hypocrite in public, there is no temptation to do that in secret. The truth rather is, that when he kneels in his closet he feels that he is alone with God, and that the very innermost secrets of his soul are known to him, with whom there he has to do. That is the reason why, when one has been doing wrong, he does not care to enter his closet. He is afraid of the revelation which will there be made to him. He is like a bankrupt merchant, who fears to

look into his books and strike a balance, because he does not want to know the certainty of his poverty, and so he drifts on into irreparable dishonor. But the very thing he fears to do now might, if it had been done by him regularly, have prevented the disaster. And in the same way, the very fact that, when one has been going astray he fears to enter his closet, is an evidence that if he had been making full use of the closet he would never have fallen into iniquity. One grand and sovereign specific against spiritual insensibility is to be found in secret devotion. That keeps the eye single and the whole body full of light. That brings us regularly up to the standard of God's law, and measures us not by the conventionalities of society or the customs of business, but by the example of the Lord Jesus. That sets us in the white light of God's own purity, and so reveals to us every spot that is in ourselves. That delivers us from the temptation of comparing ourselves with others among our fellow-men, and centres our thoughts on what we are before the All-seeing. That offers and answers at one and the same time the Psalmist's prayer, "Search me, O God, and know my ways; try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." So we venture to affirm that he who is in the habit of reviewing the transactions of the day in his closet, in the presence of God, and in the light of his Word, will not be likely to fall under the chloroforming influence of backsliding. For alone on his knees he dare not misjudge himself. At the family altar there may be some motive for acting a part, as there may be also in the sanctuary and at the communion table; but in the closet there can be none. Either, therefore, he will be sincere in it, or he will give up entering it altogether. So let every one who

would save himself from unconscious backsliding be regular and earnest in private prayer, and diligent and devout in the study of the Word of God.

But, in the second place, I remark that this insensibility to spiritual deterioration may be largely owing to the gradual way in which backsliding steals upon a man. If one's hair were to change from raven blackness to snowy whiteness in a single night, he could not fail to be struck with the alteration in his appearance. But because the grey hairs came one by one, increasing by slow degrees, and mingling with the others almost imperceptibly, he takes little knowledge of the transformation through which he is passing. To-day shows little difference from yesterday, and to-morrow will show little difference from to-day; and thus, because the process is gradual, he is apt to think that there has been no such process going on at all, and that everything is and will be as it was. If, in a single day, the constitution of a man were to give way, and he who left home in the morning "rejoicing, as a strong man, to run a race," were to return in the evening hoary and toothless, leaning on a staff, and bending under the infirmities of age, he could not fail to be aware of the change; yet, because such a transition is made through the gradations of years, there is little consciousness of the process. Let any one take a series of his own portraits in the different stages of his history—as a boy at school, as a youth at college, as a young man entering business, as a man in his prime, and as he now is on the eve of threescore years and ten—and he will be surprised at the difference between each of these and all the rest. And yet they are all correct. They were all good at the time when they were taken, for he has passed through all these stages, and it is only as he

contrasts the last of them with the first that he discovers how great the transformation has been. Who of us that has reached or passed middle age does not sympathize with Miss Procter in that beautiful lyric, in which, after describing the bringing-out by an elderly lady of a portrait which had been taken of her when she was a young woman, she moralizes in this suggestive fashion:

"It is strange: but life's currents drift us
So surely and swiftly on
That we scarcely notice the changes
And how many things are gone.

"And forget while to-day absorbs us
How old mysteries are unsealed;
How the old, old ties are loosened,
And the old, old wounds are healed.

"And we say that life is fleeting
Like a story that Time has told;
And we fancy that *we, we only*
Are just what we were of old.

"So now and then it is wisdom
To gaze, as I do to-day,
At a half-forgotten relic
Of a time that is passed away.

* * * * *

"If it only stirred in my spirit
Forgotten pleasure and pain,
Why, memory is often bitter,
And almost always in vain.

"But the contrast of bygone hours
Comes to rend a veil away,
And I marvel to see the stranger
Who is living in me to-day."

How true that is to every one's experience! The very gradualness of the changes weaves a veil that

hides their magnitude from view, and if that be the case with such as an external portrait suggests, how much more must it be so with those which affect internal character! For no one becomes very wicked all at once, and backsliding, as the very term itself implies, is a thing not of sudden manifestation, but of gradual motion. It is a sliding rather than a stepping; a course into which we slip, and not so much a condition into which we purposely and deliberately reduce ourselves. One stage passes into another like the various tints of wool in a piece of lady's needlework. At the one side there is the lightest hue of evil, and at the other there is the darkest, deepest dye of sin; but the intermediate shades merge almost imperceptibly into each other, and they are all only different degrees of the same color. So it is only when we compare the later with the earlier that the difference forces itself upon our attention.

Or, to illustrate it in another way: the distance between what we are and what we were, great though it be, has been traversed in single steps. Taken separately there was little in each of these that seemed to be of much importance. It appeared only a very slight degree different from the one by which it was preceded; but that slight degree, continued in countless successive instances, has led to a wide divergence at the last. A small difference at the point of sight on the rifle is a mighty variation before the ball reaches its destination: a little error at the marksman's hand becomes a wide one in the neighborhood of the target. And though the stone that is laid upon the foundation may be only a very little out of the perpendicular, yet the mistake, if continued up the wall, will make the whole fabric unsafe. So it is also in conduct. But, alas! we befool ourselves

by taking a view of actions simply in reference to those by which they are immediately preceded, and, because we see little difference between those that are thus in juxtaposition, we flatter ourselves that there is just as little difference between what we were at first and what we are now, and we forget that by the aggregation of those littles, to which individually we were indifferent, we have already gone far in the direction of evil.

Now, here again it is an interesting and important question, how we may counteract this tendency and discover our true position, and the answer is nearly akin to that which we gave to the former inquiry; for we shall know where we are when we test ourselves by the Word of God, as that has been vindicated for us by the example and the spirit of the Lord Jesus. The mariner does not leave himself to the chapter of accidents, or let himself drive whithersoever the elements may urge him. Each hour of his reckoning may seem in itself a comparatively small affair; but he does not therefore imagine that it is of no consequence, for he takes an observation of the sun every day with his sextant, and from that he calculates his position. So let us not compare ourselves simply with that which we were yesterday or last week or last year; but let us rather take daily sights of the Sun of Righteousness, and shape our course accordingly. Let us maintain unbroken intercourse with Jehovah; let us cultivate acquaintance with his Word; let us have stated times for self-examination, using this divine law as the standard by which we test our lives; above all, let us watch against evil beginnings, for the process of declension is gradual, and, besides, the sin itself has such a benumbing influence on the conscience that, unless we are on our guard, we may be-

come so hardened that some heinous wickedness may be committed by us with less compunction than we felt at our first departure from the course of rectitude. When the mercury in the thermometer itself becomes frozen, it makes no registration of the cold beneath that point, and so when the conscience becomes seared the soul is what Paul has called "past feeling," and such insensibility is the precursor of spiritual death. Well, therefore, may we pray with David, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me; then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."

But I remark, in the last place, that this unconsciousness of backsliding may be largely accounted for in many cases by the fact that the individuals are absorbed in other matters to such an extent that the state of the heart is forgotten. Take the case here of the successful merchant. His business is extending, and it requires all the energy he possesses, and all the time he can command, to superintend the establishment of which he is the head. In the morning his earliest thoughts are given to the arrangement of the work of the day. Each hour as it comes is filled with occupation. In the heat of his devotion to the work before him, his spirit may be chafed and his temper fretted, so that, almost before he knows it, improprieties of speech, and sharp practices in business hardly consistent with a due consideration of the rights of others may be indulged in by him. Then when evening comes he is worn out, and seeks repose without first pausing to review the day in the holy solitude of the closet. Thus from day to day the evil in-

creases, and when the Sabbath comes he is in no mood for the enjoyment of the sanctuary, and puts away from him the help that might come from God's ordinances; or, if he comes to the house of prayer, he resents the faithful home-thrusts of his pastor, and goes away angry with the truth, rather than dissatisfied with himself. The next week the evil is increased, and so the thing goes on, and the grey hairs of spiritual decrepitude are on him, while yet he is thinking only of his social respectability and his worldly success! I do not hesitate to say that it has been precisely in this way that many have gone away backward. Just in proportion as their business prosperity has increased, their spiritual health has diminished. They have not been actuated by any positive antagonism to God's Word, or moved by any positive aversion to his ways; but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches have choked the word in them, and they have become unfruitful. And what is true of business, as such, may be true of literature, or science, or art, or whatever else engrosses the entire attention of the soul. Ay, God help us! so deceitful is the human heart that it may be true even of the ministry of the gospel, for the caring for the vineyards of others may be the occasion of our neglecting our own.

Now here, again, the question arises, how is this danger to be obviated? And the answer is, in one of two ways: namely, either by curtailing the business, or by consecrating it as a whole to God. It may be prevented by curtailing our business, for beyond a certain point even that which is laudable may become a slavery, and however much he may be tempted by success, it is no man's duty to launch out into such engagements that he has neither time nor strength nor inclination for devotional meditation and closet fellow-

ship with God. I willingly concede that, at the other extreme, it is just as dangerous for one to retire prematurely altogether from business, for idleness has besetments which are as insidious as those which attend on over-exertion; and it is as perilous to have too little to do, as it is to have too much. But still, when one feels himself in danger of being sucked into secularity by the force of success, let him draw back from the eddy, and rather be content to do a smaller business, with safety to his spiritual interests, than a larger one that may imperil them. The same considerations which apply here to the health of the body, have equal force in the case of that of the soul; for just as over-work paralyzes the brain and brings on premature old age, so also it overlays the piety, and dries up the sources of the spiritual strength. The energies of the man are so engrossed in that which he has come to believe to be his duty in the store, that they are entirely diverted from the consideration of those things which concern the welfare of his soul; and as the sucker steals away the nourishment which ought to have gone into the tree, and grows at its expense, so the business is carried on to the detriment of the spirit. That which should have gone to increase the vigor of the man's holiness, has been spent in increasing the amount of his worldly wealth. Alas! alas! in how many instances among us this is the simple truth! So let me warn you, my business friends, against this danger. Let me beseech you to be content with moderation; and when you feel the demands of mercantile life becoming so engrossing that they steal you from your family and your closet, think that you may buy your riches at too dear a price, and forbear.

But this danger may be avoided, also, by the consecration of the entire business to God, so that the

attention which we give to it becomes itself a part of our service of God. This is, in my view, the loftiest attainment of the Christian life; and he who carries on his work for God, and regards its gains as not his own, but God's—he who in his daily calling is consciously and deliberately seeking to do the best for his Lord, and is trying to serve him in the store as really as in the closet, has most effectually "overcome the world." As David did with Goliath, so he beheads the world with its own sword; he takes its employments and enjoyments in such a way as to verify the poet's words:

> "Did we but use it as we ought,
> The world would school each wand'ring thought
> To its high place."

And the occupations which are to many as the chains that bind them down to earth, are to him the wings wherewith he soars into fellowship with Jehovah.

Even this victory over the world, however, cannot be gained without the observance by the man of certain special seasons for prayer and the study of the sacred Scriptures, and it is very rarely won by those who are over-driven. If, therefore, there be any before me who feel that the work and worry and turmoil and excitement of business are interfering with the progress of their spiritual life, let me beseech them to curtail the business and consecrate it. Let them resolutely set themselves to do less, and let them do it for God. I draw no bow at a venture here. I know that there are many among you in this very position. I know, too, that at this moment they are saying within themselves, "It is all very well to say curtail, but how is it to be done?" and so they are dismissing the counsel which I offer. But if an illness came upon

them, it would be done—that which they regard as absolutely impossible at present would become possible, if they were entirely laid aside. Yet it cannot be accomplished when the soul only is in the case! which means simply that the soul is of much less importance to them than the body; and if that is so, then the grey hairs are not merely here and there upon them; they are all over them, and the backsliding has come near to apostasy. Brethren, the medical men of the day have uttered many a warning against over-work, founded on its effects on the physical system; but we think too little of the results which it has upon the spiritual health. Will you give good heed to the honest, faithful, and friendly words which I have now uttered, lest you too should furnish an illustration of the Saviour's words? "That which fell among thorns are they which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares, and riches, and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection."

The fact that we are on the threshold of another* vacation gives a special appropriateness to these remarks; for during these weeks of rest and of absence from home we shall have an opportunity of revising our course of life. Things will look differently to us when we stand out and apart from the immediate surroundings of our daily engagements. The perspective will be rectified, and if we find that we have been overlaying the spiritual by the temporal, we shall have an opportunity when we return of beginning anew on the true principle of letting our moderation be known unto all men. But, if any one among us has to-day discovered his deterioration, let him not wait a single mo-

* This discourse was preached just before the summer vacation of 1879.

ment for restoration. Let him go at once to the Lord Jesus and make this petition, "Take away all my iniquity and receive me graciously." Then shall the answer come, "I will heal your backsliding, I will love you freely." And he will find that he can sing, "He restoreth my soul, he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake."

THE POWER OF GOD'S GENTLENESS.

PSALM xviii. 35.—"Thy gentleness hath made me great."

THE occasion on which this psalm was written is set forth with sufficient distinctness in its title, and the place which it holds in the second book of Samuel, near the end of David's history,* seems to indicate that it was composed by him in what may be called the evening twilight of his life, as he looked back on the checkered career through which he had been brought. It is thus the grateful utterance of his heart for God's goodness to him, and it comes welling up from the very depths of his soul.

But we may not forget that David was led through the experiences of his history, and inspired to give utterance to his feelings under them in strains like these, for others' sake as well as for his own. He sang out of his own heart, indeed, but the language of his song is such that almost every child of God, in some chapter of his life, is able to appropriate it as his own; for, even as Paul's conversion was such that in him Jesus Christ might show forth all long suffering for a pattern to them who should thereafter believe in him, so David's vicissitudes of experience fitted him to be a leader of song to God's people in every after age. Thus it is that the Christian finds those emotions, which in him are struggling to get expression, already uttered in the book of Psalms, and that to the

* 2 Samuel xxii.

music of a harp so sweet, that as he listens he seems for the time to hear the melody of heaven, and the evil spirit that before oppressed him takes its departure from his soul.

No one can glance, even in the most hasty manner, over this divine song, without observing the recognition of God's hand in all things by which it is pervaded. That sentiment enters in one form or other into almost every verse, and sometimes, as in the phrase before us, it is expressed so beautifully that, as we read the words, we are thrilled as if by some magnetic influence. Who has not often dwelt in thought on this precious saying? As, after we have heard a sweet strain of music, we keep going over and over again to ourselves some especially pleasing portion of it; or as, when we have gazed a while on a gorgeous landscape, our eyes rest at length on some object of surpassing loveliness within it; so, after we have perused this Psalm, we return again and again to the words of the text. They fall on the ear like the soft breathing of an Æolian harp, and they linger there with a permanence that earthly music knows not. Many gems flash out upon us from this book of praise, but to me there are few with a radiance so bright as that which comes from this one, "Thy gentleness hath made me great." Its very lustre, however, is an embarrassment, for my fear is that I may dim it by my merest touch. Nevertheless, even at that risk, let me attempt to bring out before you something of that preciousness which I have discovered in it for myself.

And, at the very outset, we find rising out of these words the question, what is that greatness which in the Christian is produced by God's gentleness? Scarcely two individuals have the same idea of great-

ness. All, indeed, will agree that it denotes pre-eminence, but each will have his own preference as to the department in which that is to be manifested. Some associate it with the deeds of the warrior on the battle-field, and others with the triumphs of the orator in the senate; some identify it with the achievements of the artist, and others with the creations of the poet. Some restrict it to the department of science or philosophy; while, in the view of others, it is connected mainly with the acquisition of wealth, or the attainment of rank and power. But the greatness which God's gentleness produces is a different thing from any of these. It may co-exist, indeed, with many of them, but it is distinct from them all. It is excellence in that for which especially man was originally created. Now, as we learn from Scripture that man was made in the image of God, it follows that men are great in the proportion in which they are like him. But wherein consists the greatness of God? Ask those who are nearest him and know him best, and they will reply, while they continue their song, "HOLY! HOLY! HOLY! LORD, GOD ALMIGHTY." The greatness of manhood, therefore, is greatness in holiness. It is a moral thing, for the truest manliness and the highest godlikeness are convertible terms.

This holds true, no matter what may be the position in society which a man may hold, or what may be the work which he is called to perform. Be it even the meanest menial office that he is required to fill, he who is holy in the discharge of its duties is always great; while, though he should sit upon a throne, or be reckoned by the multitudes among the heroes of the land, he who is unholy is destitute of that which alone is greatness in the eye of heaven.

Take, for example here, the character of our Lord

Jesus Christ. Is there any one who imagines that his greatness was lessened by the facts that he labored at the carpenter's bench, and was one of the poorest of the people? Not among warriors, poets, artists, statesmen, or the like, do we name him; yet, even in the estimation of those who deny his deity, he is regarded as the greatest of men. Why? Because of his pre-eminence in holiness. In him every moral excellence dwelt in its normal measure. No one of them was shaded or eclipsed by another, but all of them were held in perfect equilibrium; and such is the impression produced upon us by the splendor of his character that, though in point of intellect he stands above all who have ever worn our nature, and though he was a worker of miracles, we seldom think either of his mental ability or of his supernatural power. Now, true greatness in man is precisely what it was in him, who, because he was the God-man, was the archetypal man. It is moral excellence, the greatness of character, pre-eminence in holiness—a greatness, this, which owes its lustre to no accidental circumstances or outward accessories, like those which give importance to rank on earth, but which has in itself the elements of immortal glory, and is such that no external meanness can obscure its radiance, and no blaze of earthly glory can outshine its brightness.

Take any kind of worldly pre-eminence you choose to name, and you will see how this asserts its supremacy. Do you speak of the prowess of the warrior? Then "greater is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city;" and when, as in the case of such a one as Havelock, the two are combined, the glory of the hero is almost forgotten in our perception of the saintliness of the man. Do you refer to oratory? Then, what eloquence is more potent than the life of a good

man? Is it not true that character gives weight to the words even of a stammering tongue? and, in the case of such a man as Wilberforce, is not the fact that he was an orator almost lost sight of in our contemplation of those results which were due to the Christian elements of his disposition? Talk you of the skill of the artist with brush or chisel? Then what is that to his who, on the rude canvas of daily life, and with such brush and colors as circumstances supply, reproduces before our eyes a living likeness of the Lord he loves? Or are you enamored of the poet's greatness? Then, is it not a nobler thing to live poetry than to write it —to have the actions of every day building up an epic that shall tell of Paradise Regained within the soul? What is the greatness of the philosopher to his whose life is devoted to the practical application of principles which philosophy alone could never reach? What are the riches of the wealthy to the treasures which the holy man carries in his heart and has laid up for him above? and what are the trappings of rank in comparison with the beauty of a character that is moulded after the image of Jesus Christ by the power of God's Holy Spirit? Brethren, here is a worthy ambition for you. If you want greatness, aim after holiness; for with that the Galilean fishermen who first preached the gospel of the kingdom were more exalted than the mightiest of the Cæsars.

There is no full-rounded greatness without holiness, no matter how high the man may stand in other departments. We may admit the pre-eminence of Nelson as an admiral, but if we should attempt to call him a great man, the memory of Lady Hamilton would come up before us to prevent our desecration of the words. And though they called him the first gentleman in Europe, no power is strong enough to force the term

great into fitting fellowship with the name of George the Fourth. Nobody denies the genius of Byron as a poet; indeed there is a stage in the mental history of most of us when he holds us as by some potent spell; but who would think of calling him great, with the greatness of a full-rounded man? While, on the other hand, the poverty of Bunyan in his Bedford "cage" could not conceal the greatness of the man of God, and the fact that Carey was a cobbler could not blind even the eyes of his assailants to the consecration of his life.

Thus, whatever our outward sphere may be, to be truly great we must have an inward character of holiness manifesting itself in all our actions; and he will be the greatest who, wherever he may be, is likest Christ. Some years ago a poor Spanish sailor was brought into a Liverpool hospital to die, and, after he had breathed his last, there was found upon his breast tattooed, after the manner of his class, a representation of Christ upon the cross. You call that superstition, and perhaps you are right; yet there was beauty in it too, for if we could have in our hearts what that poor seaman had painfully, and with the needle point, punctured over his, we should be great indeed. Is not this, in truth, the open secret of Paul's pre-eminence? for he thus describes himself: "Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifest in our body." The manifestation of the life of Jesus: that is greatness, and to get that we must bear about in the body "the dying of the Lord."

But I have been anticipating somewhat the second question that comes out of my text, which is, how God's gentleness can be said to make us great. It

may seem strange that such an effect should be ascribed to gentleness as its cause. But if you will think a little on the subject, your surprise will disappear. For the human heart is always more deeply affected by tenderness than by sternness. If you want to reform a criminal, you will succeed best by adopting the method of gentleness. If you are unbending he will remain unbent; but if you are full of kindness, even while you feel that his crime cannot go unpunished, your tenderness will produce a marked result. If you wish to drag a man by force, his nature is to resist you; but if you attempt to attract him by love, it is equally in his nature to follow you. Now God, who has given us this nature, seeks to save us in accordance with it. We are criminals lying under sentence of condemnation, and he sends to us a message of deliverance willingly wrought out for us through the death of his own Son. He proclaims, through the cross of Christ, salvation to all who will receive it. But what gentleness is here? Let it be remembered that he was under no obligation to save men unless he had so chosen. No injustice would have been inflicted on any one even if no salvation had been provided, and we had been left to the consequences of our sin. But then, whatever else this leaving of sinners to themselves would have done, it never could have made men great; and so, not wishing that human greatness should disappear from his universe, God has manifested his gentleness in the mission and work of Jesus Christ, and makes proclamation of pardon and regeneration to every one who will accept them through his Son. It is the faith of this, which, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, first changes the disposition of the heart toward God. The thunders of Sinai do but terrify. They make the sin-

ner cry out, "Let not God speak to me, lest I die." But the manifestation of this love attracts. "Law and terrors do but harden," this melts the soul, and the believing apprehension of the truth that God in Christ loves me, and does not delight in my destruction, but willeth rather that I should turn unto him and live, moves me to become reconciled to him, and to accept his grace; that is—in other words—his gentleness produces in me that love to him which is the source and inspiration of holiness.

My hearer, do you believe God loves you and does not desire your destruction, but willeth rather that you should turn unto him and live? Not to believe that is to turn away from his whole gospel, is to treat his Word as if it were a lie, is to count the work of his Son as nothing. To believe that is to believe the gospel in its application to you, is to enter into peace, and to have enkindled in your heart the spark of love in which the flame of holiness ever begins. Why will you doubt it? Why will you insist on viewing Jehovah as a harsh, austere, and relentless one? To think so of him is to do him the foulest dishonor. He is a loving Father, if only you will let him love you. Yea, as Luther has it, "You are living now under the broad and ample canopy of God's forgiving love," and all you have to do is to open your heart to let its blessed influence enter in. Will you do that? Then you will be attracted to him, and you will be constrained by the love of Christ to live entirely for him—that is, his "gentleness will make you great."

But, passing from the general to the particular, you may see the words of the text verified in the manner in which God receives individuals into his love, and so begins in them the greatness of holiness. And

here I may take the recorded history of Jesus Christ, when he was on the earth, as illustrating the manner in which God receiveth back again his banished children; for he was God, the living embodiment of the Father, according as he said himself, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." How then was it with him in this regard? The reproach of his enemies was "this man receiveth sinners." He was gracious even to the world's outcasts, and those who had been hardened by the scorn and oppression of their fellow-men, were treated by him with the utmost tenderness. Think of the words he uttered in defence of the weeping penitent, when the haughty Simon looked the scorn he dared not speak in such a presence. Remember the gentleness which he showed to her whom the Pharisees dragged into his presence as he sat teaching in the Temple, and to whom, after sending her accusers out, each one with an arrow quivering in his conscience, he said, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more." Recall his long and earnest conversation with the woman at the well, and you will see in each of these cases an illustration of the triumphs which his love achieved. Or, if you would see it in another light, behold how he received Nicodemus when that ruler came to him by night. He spoke to him faithfully and earnestly, and clearly set before him the necessity, even for him, of the new birth. But no harsh things were said to him concerning his cowardice. Had there been, it is at least questionable if ever we would have heard again of Nicodemus. But behold the result of the course which he did adopt in the greatness manifested by the Jewish ruler on that day, when, though all the followers of Jesus, with one exception, had forsaken him, he declared himself at the foot of the cross.

Now, what the Lord was then, he is still. "The bruised reed he does not break; the smoking flax he does not quench;" and there is no one here whom he will not willingly and lovingly receive. Read those gentle and beneficent words which fell so frequently from his lips. Peruse such parables as that of the lost sheep, or that of the prodigal son. Recall such gracious utterances as these: "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many;" "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost;" "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." Ah! who can tell how many have been encouraged to go to him by such declarations and invitations as these? And now, as they revert to the first faint stirrings of the new life in them which these words evoked, they can say with truth, "Thy gentleness hath made us great."

But, going into another department, the truth of my text is made apparent also in the manner in which God in Christ Jesus trains his people after they have come to him. He does not leave them to themselves. He teaches them yet more and more of his grace; yet, in truest tenderness, he teaches them as they are able to bear it. He watches over them with the closest observation, and whenever they are prone to wander from him there comes some fatherly discipline from his hand. At first they may be inclined to think of it as something stern; but, by and by, when the peaceable fruits of righteousness have made their appearance, they discover its real character, and perceive that it, too, is an expression of his gentleness. He stirs up their nest indeed, and with apparent roughness drives them out of it; but, ere they know where they are, they

are borne aloft on the ample wings of his grace to loftier heights than otherwise they could have reached, so that they say, "This also cometh from a father's heart." Look how the Lord Jesus trained his disciples. Gentleness was ever uppermost in his intercourse with them. He did reprove them, indeed; but the severity of his reproof lay in the love which was beneath it, and in their after lives we see the greatness which this discipline developed.

But the same thing comes out in God's dealings with his people now. Sometimes, indeed, he deprives them of worldly possessions or beloved friends, but he does so only that they may be stimulated to grow in grace; and there is usually, in the concomitants of their trial, something to remind them of his love. "He stayeth his rough wind in the day of his east wind:" and, if the thorn of trial may not be extracted, there comes the precious assurance, "My grace is sufficient for thee; my strength is made perfect in weakness." How often have we had such experiences! Even when we have been most sorely smitten, there has come to us some view of his character or some promise of his Word which has made us feel that he had not forgotten us. And when, under his chastening dispensation, we have turned to him, how full of love was his reception of us. Thus, all through our lives, his gentleness is the background of all our discipline; and when earth is exchanged for heaven, and we stand perfected in holiness before the throne, looking back upon the way by which he led us, and marking the infinite love which called us out of the world at the first, the unwearied patience which bore with all our follies and transgressions, the tenderness which cherished us in every emergency, and the grace that supported us through death, we shall be able to understand all that is implied

in this beautiful text, and we shall sing, as we could never sing on earth, "Thy gentleness hath made me great."

The subject which I have thus imperfectly outlined has a twofold application.

It presents Jehovah to the sinner in a very affectionate attitude. Think of it, my friend. God is tender toward you. How often you have provoked him with your iniquities, your ingratitude, your procrastination! Yet he has not cut you down. You are living evidences of his gentleness; and even as he looks upon you now he says, as he did long ago to Israel, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? How shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together." How can you resist such affectionate tenderness as that? What are your hearts made of that such longing to deliver you makes no impression on them? Behold how Jesus weeps upon the brow of Olivet over the hardened impenitence of Jerusalem! Not until everything that wisdom and gentleness could do was done to prevent it was its doom pronounced, and even then it was pronounced with tears. What a sight have we there, through the manhood of Jesus, into the gentleness of the heart of God! Let, I pray you, the goodness of God lead you to repentance, and beware of despising the riches of his forbearance, for there is a limit beyond which that forbearance will not last, and there will be nothing but punishment, all the heavier because you have slighted so much grace.

Finally, this subject shows the Christian how he should seek to bring others to the knowledge of Jesus. The gentleness of God should be repeated and reproduced in us, and we should deal with others with the

same tenderness and affection as God has dealt with us.

Parents, this text speaks to you, and bids you seek the greatness, that is, the godly up-bringing of your children, not by rigorous, unbending sternness, but in tender forbearance. Do not harshly thrust them from you for every fault, nor even for serious faults let yourselves be tempted to such treatment of them as is only fitted to stiffen them in their rebellion against you. You have heard of the mother who, as she was sitting on the brow of a hill, suffered her child, unnoticed, to wander from her side, until he stood upon the very edge of the beetling cliff. She was appalled when she discovered where he was, but her maternal instinct would not let her shriek. All she did was to open her arms and beckon him to her embrace, and the little fellow, unconscious of the danger in which he stood, ran to be folded to her bosom. So let it be with you. When you see your young people standing on some precipice of temptation, do not scold or blame or cry out about it; that will only push them over. Rather open to them the arms of your affection. Make home to them more attractive than aught else. Let your fatherhood and motherhood become more to them than ever, and by your very gentleness you will make them great.

Sabbath-school teacher, this text speaks to you, and bids you, in your earnest efforts for your scholars' welfare, show to them the same gentleness that Jesus manifested when he took the children in his arms and blessed them. Do not lose your temper with them. Do not by your hard words, or hard way of saying even kind words, make yourself and your lesson alike repulsive to them. When you have to reprove them, let sorrow be more apparent than anger; so shall your

words distil into their hearts as softly as the dew-drop crystallizes on a blade of grass.

Pastor, there is here a message for thee too, and thou art commanded to be among thy people as Paul was among the Thessalonians—"gentle even as a nurse cherishing her children:" and to beware lest, by a careless or unthinking word, thou sendest away one whom a loving speech might have won for Jesus.

Yea, there is here a lesson for us all. Let us remember that

> "All worldly joys go less
> To the one joy of doing kindnesses;"

and let us tremble with a holy fear lest we should, by our repulsiveness, scare some poor soul away from the loving Saviour, who is always willing to receive the wanderer. When we are called to deal with the sinful and the sorrowful, let us imitate the example of the Lord, and to this end let us more thoroughly imbibe his Spirit. Nor let us forget that in our own sins we have a motive for the exercise of gentleness which even he did not possess; for he had no need to ask forbearance of others, while we are continually making demands on the long-suffering of our fellows. Be gentle, therefore. Be gentle everywhere, and no matter how degraded those may be with whom you come into contact, let no harsh-heartedness be shown by you. They are not so far from you as you were from Christ when he became your Saviour; therefore let the memory of Jesus at the well repress all sternness, and let your faithfulness be inspired by love.

> "Forget not thou hast often sinned,
> And sinful yet must be;
> Deal gently with the erring one,
> As God has dealt with thee."

EMPTIED FROM VESSEL TO VESSEL.

JEREMIAH xlviii. 11.—"Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." *

THE illustration used in this verse is taken from the manner in which wine is prepared. The juice of the grape, at first thick and impure, is allowed to ferment. Then it is left for a time undisturbed, until a sediment, here called "lees," is precipitated. After that it is drawn off into another vessel so carefully that all the matter so precipitated is left behind, and this emptying of it "from vessel to vessel" is repeated again and again, until the offensive odor that came at first from the "must" is gone, and it becomes clear and beautiful.

Now, by the analogy of this process, familiar even to the common people of a vine-growing country, the prophet accounts for the character and condition of Moab as a nation. In the providence of God nothing had come to unsettle that people. No external enemy had attacked them. No great national disaster had ever fallen on them. Nothing had come to rouse them

* It is due to myself to say that the topic of this discourse was suggested to me first by a sermon of Dr. Bushnell, in *The New Life;* but I have not considered that a sufficient reason for withholding it from publication. The true history of the matter is, that the sermon here presented to the reader was born out of an attempt to apply the principles of Dr. B.'s discourse to my own heart in a time of great domestic affliction.

to exertion. For these reasons they had made no progress. What they had been at first that they had continued to be, because they had been all along "at ease," with nothing to cause either "searchings of heart" or depression of spirit among them.

To all this, though there is no expressed allusion to it in the text, the history of Israel was in remarkable contrast. The Hebrews had never been allowed to remain long undisturbed. Their very exodus from Egypt only resulted at first in their wanderings through the wilderness; and even after they had received possession of the Land of Promise, they had no immunity from unsettlement. Indeed their entire national history is almost a perpetual alternation between prosperity and disturbance. At one time they groaned under the yoke of some oppressor; at another they rejoiced in the deliverance which, by the instrumentality of some "mighty man of valor," the Lord had wrought for them. Under one king they delighted in the blessings of peace; under another they endured all the agonies of war. In one age they passed through the crisis of a revolution which rent the kingdom in twain; in another they were subjected to all the discomfort and humiliation of exile. Thus they were "emptied from vessel to vessel," and so we account for the fact that, in the main, they grew in all the qualities which give greatness to nations, and were at last completely purified from the "lees" of that idolatry which had so long tainted them in the sight of God.

But the same thing holds in individuals, and we may lay it down as a principle of universal application that a man needs to be frequently disturbed and displaced by the dispensations of God's providence, if he would grow in all the elements of that greatness which con-

sists in holiness. To remain "at ease," to "settle on the lees," is fatal to spiritual advancement. That is the general law. Now, on the threshold of our investigation, let us pause a moment to see what this involves.

For one thing, it gives what may well be called a solemn significance to all true prayers for holiness. How few of us, when we make request that we may "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," have any right idea of all that the answer to that petition may involve! Is it not true of most of us, when we offer that supplication, that we imagine that God will give us what we desire in some sudden fashion, and confer the blessing upon us as an objective thing, "ready made," and all at once? But in the light of such a text as this, that is seen to be a delusion. Character is not like a garment, which may be made for us and given to us in a brief season. It is a growth within, before it is an appearance without. It is not a thing which God gives to a man in a moment, as an external possession. It is the fruit of a refining discipline, the result, like the wine in the text, of a process, and not like that of Cana, of a momentary and miraculous transmutation. But, not to mix metaphors, and going back to the illustration of growth: let us, to prevent misapprehension, distinguish between the beginning and the progress. There is a moment when the seed is planted; and, whether we can always detect it or not, the new life has always a beginning, but the germination of the seed is a thing of time and culture. It is the result of the use of means employed on us by God himself, and among these are the providential "emptyings from vessel to vessel," to which the prophet here refers. When, therefore, we ask to be made holy, it becomes

us to remember that many unsettlements in life may be required for the working out of that character in us, and that we are virtually requesting that God would never let us be so long "at ease" that we shall settle on our lees; but that, whenever he sees it to be necessary for us, he would dislodge us from one point to another, until at length, in the last "emptying" process, at death, we shall lose all trace of impurity, and stand before him among "the spirits of just men made perfect."

Then turning this thought and looking at it from the other side, we have here explained to us the reason why we are, as we phrase it, so frequently "upset" in life. We complain that we are never allowed to become "settled." Ever, as we think we have reached some place of rest, there comes a new upheaval to shake us up and out, so that we cry, "Is there to be no end of these changes?" and we sympathize with him who said, "Settled in life! As well talk of a ship as settled in the midst of the ever-restless, ever-changeful ocean, as talk of a man being settled in life." But, in the light of this verse, such repeated disturbance is recognized as a blessing, and that which in our unbelief we are disposed to call our heaviest calamity is seen to be the means of securing our highest good.

I. But, not to linger longer over generalities, let us see if we can discover what there is in these "emptyings" that fits them to promote our spiritual advancement.

1. And, in the first place, it is obvious that such dispensations have in them an influence which is well calculated to reveal us to ourselves. Too often we are ignorant of the plague of our own hearts until, under some such afflictive visitation, we are led to examine

ourselves, and to say with Job, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." The evil may have been of long standing, while yet, because of its blunting influence on the conscience, we may have been unaware of its existence until the fiery trial brought it into view. Sudden emergency is a sure opener of a man's eyes to his own defects. He may contrive to get on, in seasons of prosperity and outward calm, without becoming conscious of the weak points of his character; but let him be thrown, all at once, upon his own resources by the coming upon him of some crushing calamity, and he will then find out whether he has that within him that can stand the strain that has been put upon him. It was a shrewd remark of Andrew Fuller, that "a man has only as much religion as he can command in the day of trial;" and if he have no religion at all, his trouble will make that manifest to him. There is nothing, indeed, in the suffering, in itself considered, to give him spiritual strength; for that he must go out of himself to God in Jesus Christ; but if he cares to look, it will faithfully show him what he is and wherein he is defective. He will feel himself to be like a ship in a storm, and he will be impelled to run for some harbor of refuge. Thus it is that worldly unsettlements, in the shape of business failures, or family bereavements, or personal afflictions, or perplexities as to the path of duty have so frequently led up to a man's conversion. The soul, in such crises, has felt that there was no help for it but in God. The temporal trial has revealed the spiritual helplessness, and that again has stirred the man to repair to Christ for that which he requires. "The truth is," says a practical writer, "we never feel Christ to be a reality until we feel him to be a necessity. He tries us here, and he tries us there. He

chastens us on this side, and he chastens us on that side,"* until, thrown back upon ourselves and finding nothing there, we are driven to cast ourselves on him.

But it is in the same way that a man is trained in holiness after he has come to Christ. Just as the strain of the storm tells where the ship is weakest, and stirs up the mariner to have it strengthened there, so the pressure of trial reveals the defects of character which still adhere to the Christian. One affliction may disclose an infirmity of temper; another may discover a weakness of faith; a third may make it evident that the power of some old habit is not yet entirely broken; and thus, from this constant revelation to him of the evils that still remain in him, he is led, under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, to the attainment of a higher measure of holiness than otherwise he could have reached. Paradoxical as it may appear, the occurrence of a railway accident now and then has led to most of the improvements in railway travelling, because it has directed attention to the weak places, and evoked immediate effort to prevent the recurrence of the evil. Now much in the same way our spiritual "breaks-down" under the unsettlements of God's providence make manifest to us the deficiencies of our souls. They show us what we have been neglecting. They turn our vigilance to new points in our character, and the issue is our growth in holiness. We learn from our very defeats how we are ultimately to win the victory. Our very falls teach us how we are to stand, and the strain of trial shows us where our character needs strength.

2. But, in the second place, I think it is obvious that the frequent unsettlements which come upon us

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* *The Still Hour*, by Rev. Austin Phelps, D.D., p. 133.

in God's providence have a tendency to shake us out of ourselves. This follows as a necessary inference from what I have just said; for the more correctly we are revealed to ourselves, the less will we be tempted to lean upon ourselves. But, though it is implied in what I have already advanced, it is so important as to demand separate consideration. The essence of sin is self-preference. We will take our own way rather than God's. We will make our own plans, as if only ourselves were to be consulted. We will follow our own inclinations, without pausing to consider whether they are right, or what shall be the issue. Now, what a corrective to this idolatry of self is administered by these providential dispensations, which, coming as all such things do, unexpectedly, unsettle all our engagements, disarrange all our plans, and disappoint all our calculations. We find that where we thought ourselves wise we have been supremely foolish. Where we imagined that we had taken all possible contingencies into the account, we discover that we had left no place for God. So our most matured schemes have been abortive, our most cherished hopes have been blasted; yea, just when we conceived that now at length we had reached our ultimatum, and were beginning to congratulate ourselves on the prospect of repose, there came a sudden reverse, which emptied us out again, and we were compelled to begin anew. Thus we are brought to distrust ourselves. We find that it will not do to "lean" always "to our own understanding." By many bitter failures we are made to acknowledge that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps," and then by the Spirit of God we are led up to confidence in Jehovah. We are glad to cry with David, "Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth and teach me: for thou art the God of my

salvation; on thee do I wait all the day." We put our hand trustfully in the Lord's and depend no more on our own wisdom, but on his. The discovery of our blindness makes us cry for some one to be our guide, and the painful remembrance of many sorrows produced by our self-will disposes us to say,

> "I would not have the restless will
> That hurries to and fro;
> Seeking for some great thing to do,
> Or secret thing to know.
> I would be treated as a child,
> And guided where I go."

How many of us could, from our own histories, confirm all that I have now said! In the outset of our career we had, perhaps, grand dreams of high attainments which we were to reach, and great things which we were to do. But we had forgotten to take account of the superintending providence of God, and so one after another of our schemes had to be modified or given up, and to-day we are very different from that which ten, twenty, or thirty years ago we supposed that we should be now. We think, too, that we are worse because of that; nay, sometimes we may be disposed to call our life a failure because of that. But we are not worse, and our life has not been a failure, if we have been taught to see that God has portioned it out for us, if we have been brought to frame all our plans in humble dependence upon him, and if, beneath all our purposes as well as prayers, there is evermore that spirit of entire trustfulness in his love and wisdom that prompts us to say, "Not as we will, but as thou wilt." No, my brother, the life has not been wasted that has learned that lesson thoroughly; and the soul that lives by filial faith in God is better and nobler before him, than is that of the man who,

without reference to him at all, has done the grandest things that human skill could contrive or human might accomplish. For it is not the work that is done external to us, but that which goes on within us, that makes us great or good. Courage, then, my friend; you may have failed to carry out that life programme which long ago you drew out for yourself; but if that failure has thrown you back on your discovery that God's plan of your life was better than your own—if it has led you to have now no programme save that of waiting on and working out the will of God—if it has shattered your confidence in yourself, and led you to full confidence in Christ, then you have not failed after all, but you have succeeded in acquiring a character that may not be possessed by those whom the world calls its successful men.

For success, as God accounts success, is not the thing that people commonly call by that name. There are books on Self Help that tell us of the poor lad who climbed the ladder step by step, until he put his foot upon the topmost round, and stood before the world as the Lord High Chancellor of England or as the President of the United States; and these works, rightly used, have a value which I am not here to depreciate. But I deny that such a life, or a life framed after such a pattern, is the only one that deserves to be called successful. Show me the man who tried to mount that ladder, but in the providence of God was evermore beat back and beat down; the man whose life has been apparently one long struggle with difficulties; the man who has been repeatedly "emptied from vessel to vessel," but who, in spite of all, has only grown clearer and purer by the process; who has kept his sweetness of disposition toward his fellows, because he has increased in his faith toward God; who has

learned, in and through and by means of all his unsettlements, to hold more firmly by God's hand, and cling more closely to Christ's cross, and walk more in accordance with Christ's example, and I tell you that, in the highest sense of the word, that man's life has been a success, even though to outward appearance there has been no accumulation of wealth. We have heard enough of the success of the millionaire; let us hear more now of the success of the unsuccessful—yea, of the success of soul that sometimes comes through the ruin of earthly fortune and the blighting of our fondest plans. Character is nobler than riches or position, and the growth of that in holiness and stability ought to be the highest aim, as it will be the noblest achievement of life.

3. But, in the third place, I think it is obvious that these frequent unsettlements have a tendency to keep us from being wedded to the world, or from thinking of rooting ourselves permanently here. Some years ago, while I was rambling with a friend in the neighborhood of the English Windermere, we came upon a house which was surrounded by the most beautiful shrubs I ever saw, and I was naturally led to make some inquiry concerning them. My companion, who lived in the locality, informed me that, by a judicious system of transplanting, constantly pursued, the proprietor was able to bring them to the highest perfection. I am not horticulturist enough to know whether that would produce such a result or not, but when I heard the statement I thought at once of the manner in which God, by continuous transplanting, keeps his people fresh and beautiful, and prevents them from becoming too closely attached to the world. Its possessions are taken from them. Its friends prove faithless to them. Its relationships are broken for them.

Its joys give way in their experience to sorrows. And all this is to keep them from becoming wedded to the present life. I cannot agree indeed with those who constantly lament the troubles of earth, and speak of life as if it were a vale of tears, and nothing more. There is happiness here. There is a kind of happiness, such as it is, enjoyed by the unconverted, and there is a high and noble sort of it possessed by the Christian. But yet, even in the case of the latter, there is enough of unsettlement and disturbance to keep him from wishing to be here always. Job was in bitterness of soul, and perhaps spoke in his haste, when he said, "I loathe it; I would not live alway." But the true Christian, while he would think it sinful to say he hates life for any reason whatever, unless when it is put in the scale over against his Lord, would yet fully endorse the patriarch's other words, and say, "I would not live alway."

Now, everything that tends to disenchant the present and to fix our hearts and hopes upon the better world must have an ennobling influence upon the soul. Johnson was not wrong when he said, "Whatever makes the past, the distant, or the future predominate over the present exalts us in the dignity of thinking beings." But that is precisely what frequent unsettlements in the present life, taken in connection with his belief in the revelation of heaven's blessedness, do tend to in the Christian. Therefore, they cannot but have a holy power on the character of the man who views them in that connection. The more attractive heaven becomes to us the more shall we seek in the present to cultivate the heavenly spirit. To be weaned from earth is one of the means of making us seek our spiritual food from heaven; and the trials of earth, transplanting us from place to place and from plan to plan, tend to prepare

us for the great transplanting which is to take us from this world altogether, and root us in the garden of the Lord above.

II. I have dwelt so long on the influences which providential unsettlements are fitted to exercise upon us that I have left myself but little time to specify the particular qualities of character which they are most calculated to foster. This, however, is now the less necessary, as they have already come incidentally into view. I content myself, therefore, with the merest allusion to them.

I name first among them purity of motive and conduct; and where shall we find a better illustration of that than in the history of Jacob? He began life as a supplanter. He out-bargained Esau. He imposed on Isaac. He out-generaled Laban. We cannot admire him, and we are not drawn to him then. But when he lay on his death-bed, no characteristics strike us more than his honesty in dealing with his sons, and his sincerity in dealing with his God. And how was that transformation wrought? "By the Spirit of God," you answer, and you answer well; but I would supplement your statement by putting it thus: "by the Spirit of God, through and in connection with the frequent unsettlements to which he was subjected." Think what these emptyings from vessel to vessel were. First, there came the disobedience of Simeon and Levi, and the consequent rupture between him and the tribe of Hamor; then came the death, in circumstances of peculiar sadness, of his beloved Rachel; that was followed by the mysterious disappearance of Joseph, not without suspicion that his sons had leagued against him to deceive him; then came the famine, the detention of Judah in Egypt,

and the demand for Benjamin. Each of these was a new draining off, which left behind it some of the old lees of his former self, and so purified him that he could say at last, "I have waited for thy salvation, O God." And what is that mellowing which we see in so many Christians far advanced in life, but just a specimen of the same thing? You cannot reach that maturity at a bound. There is a certain effect on wine which only age can produce; and there is here an effect on character which requires a whole series of providential displacements to bring it about.

Then, again, these "changes and surprises," as they have been called, tend to foster strength, either for endurance or for action. Take for example, here, the case of Abraham. As you see him ascend Moriah, with the full purpose of laying his son upon the altar, you marvel at the might of his faith and the firmness of his determination. But your wonder diminishes when you discover that he had been in training for that triumph almost from that first "emptying" time, when it was said to him, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." Never for long at a time was he left to settle "on his lees." He was tried in Canaan and in Egypt; he was tested by the long delay in the fulfilment of the promise in regard to Isaac, and by the domestic discord that arose concerning Ishmael; and his wrestlings with these afflictions developed in him, by the grace of God, that spiritual might in which he conquered on the Mount of the Lord, when he earned for himself the title of "the father of the faithful."

But it is in this way that God trains his people yet. They are disciplined by him into strength through resistance to temptation, or by the endurance of suffer-

ing. Those are the most heroic Christians who have been the most frequently unsettled, and to whom God, in his providence, has given the least measure of ease. The veteran soldier who has been in many fights can stand fire in the crisis of some decisive day better than the raw recruit, who has never before been on a battle-field; and the "Old Guard" in the army of the Captain of our salvation is composed of those who have learned, by repeated experience, "how sublime a thing it is to suffer and be strong."

But we must not forget to mention further, here, that the recurrence of these "emptying" processes deepens the sympathy and widens the charity of the Christian. Indeed I hazard the assertion that no man can be called complete in character who has not been subjected to them. It is in this very relation that our Lord himself is said to have been "made perfect through suffering," and each of us has doubtless had an experience of his own which enables him to understand what seems at first so strange. Did not every new trial through which you passed help you to comprehend better than you did before the bearing of some friend when a similar affliction fell on him? You made light of his case at the time; yea, perhaps you said some bitter or severe things about the way in which he bore himself under his burden. Possibly you even went the length of casting suspicion on the genuineness of his piety. But now that you have had your own "unsettlement," how heartily ashamed you are of all that you then felt and said! You would not repeat your cynical utterances again; yea, you would give much if you were able to recall them, and, if ever you see another in his case, you will not pass upon him the same uncharitable judgment. You have learned from your own "to melt at others' woe." You

have been taught by your own case to make allowance for and charitably to put the best construction on the apparent weakness of another. Experience is thus the mother of sympathy and charity. In this way we explain the fact that very young Christians are commonly the least charitable toward those who do not come up to their standard, and the least able to manifest intelligent sympathy with the suffering. They make too much of seeming faults and too little of real distress, just because they have not themselves been yet called to pass through the unsettling process under which others have appeared to fail. The older a Christian grows he learns to feel for others more, and to condemn them less, and he is a true "son of consolation" only in the proportion in which he is able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God. Twenty years ago I should never have been drawn to this text, and could have given no very appreciative explanation of its meaning; but the providence of God, in the interval, has written, many times over, a commentary on it over my own heart; and if to-day I have been enabled to read that off correctly for your comfort and edification, to him be all the praise.

What I have been saying, then, all tends toward these two propositions, namely, that unbroken prosperity would be a curse to a man, and not a blessing; and that providential unsettlements, when rightly interpreted and improved, are really favors, though they do come draped in sadness. I am not sure, indeed, that there is in any human lot such a thing as absolutely unalloyed prosperity; but wherever there has been so little trial that a man has "settled on his lees," his success has been a positive injury to him. On the

other hand, when afflictions occurring in God's providence are so understood and applied as to lead us to advancement in holiness, they are then blessings indeed.

And now I must conclude. I have spoken, I am sure, to the hearts of many this morning. I hope I have comforted them in the retrospect of God's dealings with them in the past, but I greatly fear that I may have seemed almost unintelligible to some of the younger portion of my audience. Still, even to them I have only to say that if they do not comprehend my meaning now they will by and by, and therefore I request them to treasure up the remembrance of my words for their future benefit. Many years ago, while I was seeking a holiday, and travelling on one of the English railways—that beautiful line that leads along the banks of the Wye—I came to a junction at which the train was divided. I had in the carriage with me some frolicsome young fellows who were off for their vacation, and full of mischief. As we stood at the station, a porter came along who went on the top of the carriage and thrust a lighted lamp through an opening in the roof. When he came down, one of my irrepressible neighbors shouted out to him, "Hallo! old boy! have you put in that to let us see the sunlight?" for it was high noon. Without saying a word, the porter looked at the youth with a grim smile and passed on. A short time after we resumed our journey, and the presence of the lamp above us, as well as the pleasantry that had been occasioned by its insertion, had been forgotten, when the engine whistled and we went thundering into a long, dark, dreary tunnel, and as we sat there, looking at each other in the Rembrandtlike light which the lamp shone down

upon us, we were all glad of its presence. To-day I have hung for you a light in the roof of the carriage. Such a thing may seem now to be superfluous. So long as you are travelling through sunshine and in the open country, you may not be conscious of its presence. But wait a little! and when your course lies through some dismal and "eerie" tunnel, its light will cheer you, and you will bless God for the comfort it imparts. You will not go far before something comes in God's providence to "empty you from vessel to vessel," and when it comes, you may perhaps remember Moab, and thank God that he has not left you to "settle on your lees."

SOWING AND REAPING.

JOHN iv. 36-38.—"And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors."

To understand the general law which these words enunciate we must first attend to the particular instance to which it is here applied. At noontide on a bright eastern day the disciples had left their Master sitting alone and weary on the well of Jacob. They had gone into the city to buy food, and now, some considerable time later, they had returned with the necessary supplies. But they did not know that, in the interval, he had, in a most remarkable conversation, planted the good seed of the Word in the heart of a woman—of no very good reputation either—who had come out for such a common purpose as to draw water; and so when, in answer to their pressing entreaty to partake of some of the food which they had brought, he said, "I have meat to eat which ye know not of," they were completely taken aback. Lacking the spiritual perception to see that he referred not to material bread, they said among themselves, "Hath any man brought him aught to eat?" but he immediately set them right by declaring that his "meat was to do the will of him that sent him, and to finish his work," and proceeded to invite them to share with him that rich repast. His words may be thus freely

paraphrased: "When the husbandman has sown his seed, he is in the habit of saying, 'Now after four months we shall have a harvest,' and these words have come to be proverbial in the land, so that when one is impatient of results men are ready with the remark, 'There are four months to the harvest.' But lift up your eyes and see the hurrying multitude coming over the fields from the city. In them behold a crop ready for your sickles, a crop by the reaping of which you will gather fruit unto life eternal, and receive wages for yourselves. That is a harvest which has not required months for its development, for I have sown the seed from which it has sprung in the brief interval of your absence, and you the reapers, and I the sower, will rejoice together in its ingathering. Thus we have again an exemplification of the proverb, 'One soweth and another reapeth;' for you have done nothing to bring about the state of things which here confronts you, but are entering into the fruitage of the labor in which, while you were gone, I was engaged—an emblem this of your work as a whole in the ministry to which I have called you. Do not forget it, for, rightly considered, it may be full of instruction to you in your after lives. When you are sowers, it may teach you not to begrudge to others the joy of reaping the results of your toil; and when you are reapers, it may admonish you not to arrogate to yourselves all the joy and honors of the harvest, for in the great ingathering at last, even as here to-day, he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together."

But, in thus appropriating and applying the common proverb, "One soweth and another reapeth," the Lord widens its range, and takes away from it the sadness and almost cynicalness which in the mouths of many it expresses. For, as generally used among men, it sug-

gests the idea that the rewards of labor often fall to those who have had no hand in earning them, while they who have borne the burden and the heat of the day go apparently unremunerated. The profits of an invention are very frequently made by others than the plodding philosopher whose ingenuity devised it; and it is too true that those who have been the greatest benefactors of their race have been supplanted as regards celebrity and emolument by inferior men. There have been many in history who have had to say with Leicester when, writing from the Netherlands, he plaintively moralizes after this fashion, "But so is the hap of some, that all they do is nothing, and others that do nothing do all, and have all the thanks." * And in the estimation of most people, few calamities can be worse than that which Job wished might come upon himself, if he were as bad as his friends represented him to be, when he used this imprecation, "If any blot hath cleaved to mine hands, then let me sow, and let another eat." But however true that view of the case might seem to be when merely present and temporal interests are considered, the Saviour here gives his followers to understand that, so far as moral and spiritual things are concerned—and when we take human history as a whole into the account, much more when we include eternity as well as time in our calculation—no true sower will ever be deprived of his share of the harvest; for at the last, "He that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together." Thus he widens our view that he may rectify our impressions; he corrects the selfishness of the individual by fixing his thoughts on the welfare of humanity at large; and he brings in the rewards of eternity to counterbal-

* Jacox, *Scripture Proverbs*, p. 547.

ance the apparent anomalies of time. It may do us good, therefore, to amplify a little in our meditations the important truths which these words of his suggest to us.

Let us consider, in the first place, our relation to the past. It is true of every one of us that we have been sent to reap that whereon we bestowed no labor. Every man is born into an inheritance which he had no hand in earning. The generation of to-day began where that of yesterday left off. We who live now are the heirs of all the ages, and have received as a patrimony that aggregation of literature, religion, civilization, and science which has been accumulating since the beginning. This is one of the great features which distinguish the human race from the brute creation. The lion of to-day is precisely what the lion was three thousand years ago. The beavers build their dams, and the birds their nests, and the bees their combs exactly as they did ages ago. Instinct makes no progress. But intelligence grows; the wisdom of the past accumulates for men into a capital for the present, and the thoughts of one generation pass into and fructify in the next.

Geologists tell us that through long millenniums this earth was in process of preparation for the dwelling-place of man. One species of vegetation after another came and left its deposit. One kind of animals after another appeared and left their bones to petrify. Thus stratum after stratum rose, until at length the globe was furnished for the abode of man. Now just so it has been with the successive generations of men. They have not been simply repetitions of each other, like the generations of the lower animals, but each as it has passed away has left some

new stratum of knowledge, or wisdom, or experience to be added as its instalment to the patrimony of the race. Thus the child of to-day is richer in many respects than our own childhood was. The citizen of America in the nineteenth century is, by no labor of his own, but simply through his coming into the inheritance of his generation, vastly better off than the Pilgrim Fathers were when they landed on Plymouth Rock, or than the subjects of King Charles were in the seventeenth century; and the member of the Christian Church in these days is on a far loftier vantage ground than that of those who lived when books were dear and scarce, when Sunday-schools were unknown, or when religious liberty was not fully understood and enjoyed.

All this is so evident that it hardly needs corroboration. Take the matter of our school-books, and see how much richer our literature is now than it was only a century ago; so that, in very deed,

> "Young children gather as their own
> The harvest that the dead have sown."

and the words of Dugald Stewart are receiving constant verification among us, for "the discoveries which in one age are confined to the studious and enlightened few, become in the next the established creed of the learned, and in the third, form part of the elementary principles of education." Then what strides have been made in physical science since the time when Galileo turned his rude telescope to the heavens, or even since the day when Newton elaborated his law of gravitation. What an impulse was given to inventiveness by him who, as a boy, first learned the power of steam as he heard the "birr" of the lid of his mother's tea-kettle on the kitchen fire.

We have become so used to travelling over sea in the steamboat, and over land in the railroad car, that we have almost forgotten that these are modern luxuries with which our boyhood, not to say the boyhood of our fathers, was not blessed; and as we receive a cable message, transmitted to us beneath the ocean, we seldom pause to think that if the telegraph and the telephone could have been shown to our fathers as they are, and without the intervening stages in their development by which we became accustomed to the idea, they might have been disposed to trace them to witchcraft or the black art. But in the enjoyment of all these things, the most of us have to say that we are reaping that whereon we bestowed no labor; and the wealthy merchant, who, in his gruff sternness, insists that his son shall go back and begin housekeeping on the same level as he himself began, forgets that, so far as the grandest wealth of our generation is concerned, it is absolutely impossible for a boy to commence where his father did, for he is richer in all the surroundings of his position than the youth of forty years ago was; and so, in spite of paternal niggardliness, he stands already higher than his father did.

But, more to our present purpose, we see the same increase in the patrimony of the race in religious matters. The Church is richer to-day, by the whole modern missionary enterprise, than she was a hundred years ago. She has added, in the successes of her foreign laborers, a new volume to Christian evidences. She has acquired a property in their lives, which has elevated and ennobled the standard of our home piety, and she has shared with them in the joy of bringing multitudes to Christ. What treasures again have been added during that time to her hymnology. It is precisely a hundred years since John Newton pub-

lished those Olney Hymns which contained so many of Cowper's gems. Before that time Watts, Doddridge, Toplady, and Wesley were the leaders in the sacred choir, and scarcely any other hymn-writers of merit had appeared. But now how their number has increased, so that we are richer in this department by the productions of Montgomery, and Lyte, and Bonar, and Palmer, and Elliot, and many more, whose verses have been the wings whereon our devotion has soared—lark-like, singing as it soared—to God. How much, too, has our Christian literature been enriched, so that it is comparatively easy for us now, by the aid of the help that is thus furnished, to get at the true meaning of the Word of God, and defend it from the assaults of its enemies. So, also, we are reaping what others sowed in the existence of the Sabbath-school, in the establishment of town missions, in the organization of young men's and young women's Christian Associations, and in the inauguration of the temperance movement, while a distinct advance has been made, through the Evangelical Alliance, in the cultivation between Christians of every name of that love which is superior to all gifts and graces.

All these have come to us largely without our own exertions. We found them existing when we arrived at years of discretion, and, whether we confess it to ourselves or not, what we are these have largely made us. Your millionaire who has risen from the ranks struts about and calls himself a self-made man, prating about independence the while. But no man is independent of those who have gone before him; and every man—I care not who he may be—began upon a capital of surrounding advantages which he did not earn. This is true in the world, and it is equally true in the Church, so that it can be said to each of us by our common

Lord and Master, "I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor."

But now let me advance, in the second place, to consider our duty to the present. We have received all these advantages, not to rest in them, but to improve them and add to them, so that we shall leave them to those who shall come after us, enlarged and enriched by some new deposit of our own. The danger of the youth who in early life inherits a large fortune is in one or other of two directions. Sometimes he is tempted to indolence or prodigality. He thinks, perhaps, that he has no need to exert himself, and then idleness brings other vices in its train, so that by degrees his patrimony disappears, and he leaves little or nothing to his children. It is a common remark that the children of wealthy men often come to grief; and in Yorkshire they have a homely proverb applying to such cases, to the effect that "The third generation comes to clogs." But even when this temptation is resisted, the young heir is apt to think that he must be simply a repetition of his father, and so he continues in the same groove, doing the same things, after the same fashion, until he seems to be in the present a kind of living fossil of the past.

Now, the same perils attend us in receiving the heritage of the past, and the counteractive to them is to be found, not simply in setting ourselves to work, but in setting ourselves to such work as is in harmony with our generation. David served his generation in unifying and extending his kingdom, and in collecting treasure for the building of the temple. But if Solomon had attempted to do just as his father did, there would have been no progress. So he took up his father's idea, and, in the erection of the temple, he carried it to its

glorious fruitage. One sows, that is his peculiar department; another reaps, that is what is demanded of him. Franklin went a certain length in the investigation of electricity. But his successors were not content either to rest in what he did, or to continue doing again what he had done so well, but they developed his ideas; and so, through Henry and Morse and Wheatstone and Thompson and Bell and Edison, we have passed from the lightning-conductor to the submarine cable and the telephone. In like manner, the literature of the present is not a mere reproduction of that of the past—it is rather an outgrowth from it.

And the theology and Church life of to-day are distinctive of to-day. Each age has to meet its own problems for itself, and seek their solution by its own improvement on the advantages of the past. Thus it happens that, without giving up or drifting from those great central truths which are perennial, we have to-day our own way of presenting and applying these truths; and the men who were the leaders of a former generation would be barely listened to in this. No doubt, if these men were living now, they would be among the first to take in the new situation, and would become as prominent in this age as they were in their own. But what I mean is, that if they were to reappear with their old modes of speech and thought, they would seem as antiquated in our eyes as the dress of their era would to modern taste. So, while it would be pernicious if we were to rest on our oars and sink into lethargy over the blessings which we have inherited, it would not be wholesome, either, if we were simply to seek to reproduce the past. What we have to do is to apply the perennial principles of the Scriptures, as enforced by the experience of history, to the ever-changing necessities of the times. Thus we shall

be kept from stereotyping the past, and we shall begin to understand what the poet means when he says that

> "God fulfils himself in many ways,
> Lest one good custom should corrupt the world."

There was a time in the history of the Jewish nation when there was need for a call to special attention to the outward services of worship; and the men who made that call were indeed the earnest reformers of their age. But their successors, unmindful of the principle on which I have been insisting, simply contented themselves with repeating them, and so Phariseeism was developed. That which was a reality in the former became a form in the latter. What in the one class was a voice became in the other a mere echo, until at length the Saviour came and compared them to whited sepulchres, which were beautiful to external appearance, but within full of dead men's bones. Now, there is always this same danger in our use of the legacy which we have received from our fathers. We are called not to hoard that legacy, but to trade with it in the markets of the present, and to improve it by carrying out the principles rather than repeating the actions of our ancestors. The Puritans in their day did a magnificent service; but must the type of character which was so useful then be made the model for all times? If that were to be attempted, we should certainly, while copying them externally, be recreant to their principles; for what they contended for was liberty, and what they resisted was the prescription of an ironclad uniformity. I take that example the more readily, because I have almost unbounded admiration for the Puritans, and because I believe that the principles by which they were animated were founded on the Word of God.

You see, then, to what my argument is tending. We owe it to the present that we take the legacy of the past, and apply its accumulation of wisdom, experience, and advantage to the exigencies of the days that are passing over us. Not to reproduce the past, but to develop all that is good, and noble, and useful in it to results of yet greater service to humanity than our fathers rendered—that is the duty of the hour. In the nation, let us apply to the questions of the day the same principles of justice, honesty, and statesmanship as those which actuated the founders of our republic, and let us seek to manifest the same public spirit and disinterestedness as most of them displayed, so that we may carry the country up to something higher than they had ever conceived. And in the Church, let us be always more forward to apply the lessons of the past than to quote its precedents. The motto of God's people is ever "Forward," and we are not to be jealous of new enterprises, which are only the application of old principles to new circumstances. The moment you attempt to stereotype the manifestation of spiritual life you petrify the life itself. Therefore, in paying the debt which you owe to those who shall come after you, see to it that you guard against a mere external copy of the past, as well as against an entire slighting of its advantages. Let your lives be spent in the adaptation of the wealth of the ages to the necessities of the new day. Joshua was not the mere repetition of Moses, nor Elisha of Elijah; and yet each took of the fruitage of his predecessor, and scattered that in the furrows of his own time.

But now, lastly, let us look at our joy in the future. "He that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice to-

gether." It is here, as I have hinted in the outset of my remarks, that Christ's teaching transcends the proverbial philosophy of the world. The men of the earth speak only of the earth. Their thoughts and aims are bounded by the horizon of the world and this visible life, and so when a brave sower dies before he has reaped the fruit of his endeavors, they call it loss, misfortune, almost injustice. But Jesus takes in eternity, and this—at least so far as spiritual sowing and reaping are concerned—gives all the workers alike a share in the reward. For when the Christian sower dies he does not pass into a region where he can have

> "No share in all that's done
> Beneath the circuit of the sun."

On the contrary, he enters then into the presence of the great Sower who is also the Lord of the Harvest, and as each new reaper comes "bringing his sheaves with him," he has his proper meed of joy and honor, for so much of his labor as went to the production of those sheaves. The reaper has a reward for his reaping; but the sower, too, is blessed for his ploughing, and for his forethought and effort in the scattering of the seed. For, as one has admirably said, in commenting on this passage, "The blessed issue of the whole ingathering is the interest alike of sower and reaper; it is no more the fruit of the last operation than of the first; and just as there can be no reaping without previous sowing, so those servants of Christ, to whom is assigned the pleasant task of merely reaping the spiritual harvest, have no work to do and no joy to taste that has not been prepared to their hand by the toilsome and often thankless work of their predecessors in the field. The joy, therefore, of the great harvest-home will be the common joy of all who have

taken any part in the work from the first operation to the last."* Thus in the end, and through eternity, both sower and reaper have their own reward, and both rejoice together.

There were reformers before the Reformation, without whom Luther's work had not been performed, and in the harvest time at last they shall be honored as really as he. William Tyndale was the pioneer who prepared the way for the making of our present version of the Holy Scriptures, yea, in the antique individuality of its style that translation is more his than it is that of any other man. So he has—shall I call it?—a royalty of reward accruing to him from all the triumphs which this book has won. When he died at the stake at Vilvorde it might have seemed that he had been entirely unrequited, and the late honors which have been heaped upon his name do not pass to him within the veil. But whither earthly trophies and memorials cannot enter, redeemed souls are continually going, and of these all who have used the English tongue here below shall add new joy to the happiness of the great reformer. But the same will be true of every faithful one who, while he lived on earth, sought, David-like, to serve his generation by the will of God.

How much is there in all this, my brethren, to cheer the desponding laborer in the service of his Lord! Often he may be inclined to cry, "Who hath believed our report?" but earnestness and self-sacrifice in the work of Christ will be always honored, no matter what may seem to be the immediate result. If the issue appear to be successful, the reward will be given not for the success, but for the labor; while if it appear to be unsuccessful, the labor will still be acknow-

* Dr. David Brown, Commentary *in loco.*

ledged, and the success too will come, it may be "after many days." Livingstone laid down his life in the desert of Africa, having accomplished little direct good for those whom he met there. But he has stimulated others to send missionary brethren to the very heart of that dark continent; and in all the after results of the preaching of the gospel there he will have, at the great harvest-home, as true a joy and as real a share as any one of those who were actively engaged in the work. Yea, though a man have been directly instrumental in bringing only one soul to Jesus, yet in the after labors and successes of that soul he will have an interest. So let none of us be desponding. The simplest and commonest service will not be forgotten at the last; and the mother of the great preacher, on whose lips thronging multitudes hang, and from whom they receive strength and inspiration, will be honored by all these at last, for the faithful, loving example which first led her son to the Lord, and then to the consecration of his life to the ministry of the gospel.

But, viewed from the other side, this truth is well calculated to keep us humble in our work. The credit of our success is never all due to ourselves. Of course God always gives the increase; but what I mean now is, that the planting of Paul may have had as much to do with results as had the watering of Apollos, even although it may not have had so much popular acceptance at the time. It becomes us always to remember, therefore, that in tracing results to their source, we must go back to influences that were at work before we came upon the scene. I knew a class of young women some time ago whose teacher was obliged, on the score of health, to give up his labors among them. They obtained another teacher, and during the first few

months of his work, no fewer than eight of them became decided Christians and enrolled themselves among the members of the church. Of course the reaper was glad. He was receiving the best wages one can obtain. But was all the joy his? Was nothing of this result due to that former sower who for years had been instructing them? Equally, of course, we answer that much of it was to be traced to him, and in the end they will share the reward together. Some ten years ago I was privileged to be present at the opening of a new church in the first year of the pastorate of a new minister in one of the large manufacturing towns of Lancashire, England. There was an immense congregation, and prominent among the throng I recognized a number of noble and intelligent young people who had been trained in the old church by the old minister. For eight-and-thirty years he had toiled in that field. He had bravely battled with difficulties which would have daunted a less ardent breast. He had seen many brought to Jesus by his efforts. He had trained many from childhood to manhood and womanhood in Christian character; he had laid with his own hands the foundation stone of that new building; he had largely, by his own energy and liberality, secured its erection; but he was not there to see it opened, for he had been called away suddenly to glory, and another had been installed in his place. Yet who does not see that in such circumstances the larger share of the honor was his, and that in the final harvest the larger share of the joy, too, will be his?

Nor, in this connection, can I forget the name of him*

* This discourse was preached only a few days after the announcement of the death of the Rev. Jos. P. Thompson, DD., LL.D., former pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle, who expired at Berlin on the morning of the 20th September, 1879.

so dear to many of you, who, for seven-and-twenty years, was the honored and useful pastor of this church. Indeed, I know that you have already anticipated me in such an application of the principle which I have been enforcing. Truly, if ever a man could be said to be sent "to reap that whereon he bestowed no labor," I was that man when I was sent hither. I had not even seen a single member of the church, far less had any hand in helping it up to the condition which it had then attained. But another had been laboring faithfully. Just about the time when I went to the Glasgow University, with as little idea of ever coming to America as I have now of going to the North Pole, Dr. Thompson came to this city. For twelve years he wrought with diligence in that old Tabernacle, which was in those days the rallying-place for all earnest spirits that sought to advance liberty or religion. Then in 1857, while I was engaged in building a church in Liverpool, he led you up to the site on which we are now assembled, and encouraged you to rear this house. Here, too, for fourteen years he labored, gathering to himself, through a peculiarly trying time, the respect and confidence of the community, until he came to be honored as a leader and beloved as a friend. And when he left his native land, and came as your advocate to beseech me to accept your call, there was at once a noble satisfaction and a deep pathos in his entreaty that I would enter upon his labors. When I came hither I found that I owed it largely to him that such a building as this was in existence; that I was mainly indebted to him for the training of the people of whom I was to be the pastor; and especially that I was under obligation to him, for the fact that the minister of the Broadway Tabernacle was expected to be a man of broad intelligence, liberal sympathies,

earnest thoughtfulness, and Christian public spirit. He had made this pulpit a place of influence, and to all the advantages and responsibilities of that place I had become the heir.

Surely, then, if God has given me any success here, I must trace the sources of that, in many respects, back to him; and to-day, as I think of him as in the presence of the Master whom he loved and served, I delight to make public this tribute of that indebtedness to him, which my heart has felt since the first day I preached from this pulpit. I know he rejoiced in my work, and in my acceptance with you. He knew, too, how greatly I held him in honor for his work's sake; and though I met him only once on the earth, we two—he and I—will have special ties binding us to each other in heaven, as we commune there of our life-work on earth.

> "For the harvest-home we'll keep,
> And the summer of life we'll share,
> As he that sowed and I that reaped
> Rejoice together there."

So let us be quickened by these thoughts, each to do his proper work, and instead of shuddering at the expectation of the end, let us rather exult in the prospect of that day when, from his own corner of the field, each now-tearful sower shall "come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

THE END.

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